MARCHMONT:

A NOVEL.

BY CHARLOTTE SMITH.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

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MARCHMONT.

CHAPTER I.

. . . . . His poor ſelf,
A dedicated beggar to the air!
Walks, like Contempt, alone.

WHILE his daughter was gradually accuſtoming herſelf to the dreary ſolitude to which he had condemned her, and even learning to take in it an intereſt that he little ſuſpected could ever ariſe, Sir Audley Dacres, amidſt the buſy ſcenes of political life in which he was now more deeply than ever engaged,

had ſtill leiſure to feel uneaſineſs from the conſciouſneſs of having acted wrong. His deſire of gratifying Lady Dacres, even in a point which certainly did not raiſe her character in his eſteem; his long-eſtabliſhed habits of making himſelf obeyed; and the various advantages which his ambition continually repreſented as attending on an alliance with Mr. Mohun—advantages that ſeemed to juſtify whatever means he had taken to bring it about—all were conſiderations inſufficient to ſilence entirely thoſe reproaches which his conſcience was ſo impertinent as to make on the ſubject of Althea.—It was in vain that his wife (who failed not to perceive his uneaſineſs) endeavoured, by the moſt artful methods, to perſuade him, that almoſt any other father, under ſimilar circumſtances, would have acted more rigorouſly. Sir Audley, though he affected to acquieſce, and ſaid hardly any thing on the ſubject, felt his diſquiet continually

tinually increaſe; and amidſt the drudgery of party cabals, in which he was deeply engaged, and which required the conſtant vigilance of thoſe who were admitted to them, he began ſeriouſly to conſider, if, without bringing his eldeſt daughter into the houſe of her ſtepmother, which he knew would embitter his life with continual feuds, he could find no properer ſituation for her than a deſerted manſion on the confines of Devonſhire; no ſociety more eligible than that of his own diſcarded ſervants.

This, however, on a nearer view, was leſs eaſily found than might be imagined. There were houſes of reputation in London, where young women are received who have no proper home; but he knew the expence would be a great objection with Lady Dacres, who muſt beſides, in ſubmitting to ſuch a meaſure, feel it to be a tacit acknowledgement that ſhe would not admit and protect the daughter of her huſ-

band.—Of Althea's own family, there was not one who was likely, or proper, to afford her an aſylum—nor did he know, among all the women of his acquaintance who might have been glad to have received her as a temporary viſitor, any to whom he could be thoroughly ſatisfied to entruſt her.—She had now been more than a month at Eaſtwoodleigh; and ſo far from her baniſhment having effected what he hoped from it, a change of ſentiments in favour of Mohun, her laſt letters had borne a greater appearance of cheerful reſignation than the firſt. If then, during this dead and dreary month, her reſolution had reſiſted the ſadneſs of ſuch perfect ſecluſion, there was but little probability that it would fail, when the return of ſpring ſhould give her the liberty of purſuing thoſe innocent pleaſures for which he knew ſhe had acquired a taſte, from her education and habits of life.—To inſiſt therefore on her

her continuing there, did not ſeem likely to anſwer the end he propoſed; but while he wiſhed to relinquiſh a plan which he could not but conſider as cruel and unwarrantable, he did not believe that the removal of his daughter to thoſe ſcenes where ſhe ought to appear would by any means accelerate his views in regard to Mohun. He knew that wherever ſhe was ſeen ſhe could hardly fail of exciting general admiration; and he did not think that the preference of others was likely, in the opinion of Althea, to give value to that of Mohun. But Sir Audley, half diſpoſed to relinquiſh a plan ſo little likely to be effected, believed that were Althea to appear in public, attended with thoſe advantages which other young women enjoyed, ſhe could not fail of being advantageouſly married, notwithſtanding the ſmallneſs of her fortune; and ſuch an event was ſurely the moſt deſirable both for Lady Dacres and himſelf.

Some degree of perſonal indiſpoſition added to the painful regret with which he ſometimes thought of his harſh conduct towards Althea. His views, like thoſe of all ambitious men, opening as he aſcended, were yet often overclouded and diſappointed. The friendſhips of politicians he found, above all other reliances, fallacious, and he frequently found himſelf diſappointed and ſupplanted by the creatures he had himſelf placed in the way of favour.

The baſe traffic of his conſcience and his underſtanding againſt the hopes of a larger income, or a more eminent poſt, had not hitherto paid him as he expected; and ſome late inſtances of the imperious and overbearing temper of Mohun had internally diſguſted him, though they were apparently more cloſely united than ever.

But however frequently his mind adverted to the ſubject of Althea, he could find no place of reſidence which would be

be at once eligible for her, and without objection on the part of Lady Dacres.—While he conſidered and re-conſidered the matter, time wore away. His ſons, who were his greateſt objects, came home for the Chriſtmas receſs, and, with the eldeſt, ſuch a report from the maſter of the public ſchool where he had been placed, that, though it was conveyed in terms the moſt conſiderate, Sir Audley was convinced an inſtant removal from thence was neceſſary; and his thoughts were immediately engroſſed with ſo important a debate as of courſe followed, in regard to what was to be done with a boy ſo difficult to govern, and ſo conſcious of his own conſequence.—Sir Audley was inclined to the Univerſity; but Lady Dacres remarking that the ſons of ſome of her acquaintance, who had been there, had turned out extremely ill, and that in the diplomatic line, for which Mr. Dacres was deſigned, an univerſity education was by no means

neceſſary; it was at length, after much heſitation and debate, determined, that this eldeſt hope of his family ſhould make the tour of Italy and Germany, ſince that of France could not now be included; and that he ſhould forthwith be provided with a tutor verſed in foreign languages, and proceed in about ſix weeks on his travels.

Theſe deliberations, and ſome diſcoveries of his ſon's diſpoſition, which forced themſelves upon his obſervation, however he wiſhed not to ſee them, ſo entirely occupied his mind, that Althea was almoſt forgotten—and the time he could ſpare from his political engagements was wholly given to repreſs the exceſſes of this young man, and to the diſcovery of ſome proper perſon to whom he could be entruſted when no longer under parental authority.

During the courſe of this enquiry, it happened, by the means of Lady Barbara Newmarch, to reach the knowledge of

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one of thoſe women in a certain rank of life, who with ſome literature, and much pretence, acquire a ſort of authority in ſuch matters; ladies, who have *converſations* inſtead of routs and aſſemblies, and who, without making too ſtrict a ſcrutiny into their motives, may often be allowed the praiſe of doing ſome good, by their occaſional patronage of obſcure merit; though doubts have ariſen whether they may not occaſionally have done harm, in teaching thoſe to fancy themſelves people of genius, who had only aſſurance, and ſome powers of imitation.

Be that as it may, Mrs. Giſborough, the lady now in queſtion, having heard of Sir Audley's enquiry after a young man well educated as tutor to Mr. Dacres, loſt no time in entreating Lady Barbara to endeavour to keep the appointment open till a gentleman could be written to, who, ſhe was ſure, would be unexceptionable.—Sir Audley rea-

dily promiſed the delay of a few days—and then the following letters paſſed between him and Mrs. Giſborough:

"DEAR SIR,

"Aſſured of your ſtrong adherence to thoſe principles which have always diſtinguiſhed *our* families, and which your preſent highly reſpectable connections do ſo much honour to, I am free to believe that the young gentleman whom I have to mention to you cannot fail of being approved, he owing the decline of his family's fortune to the attachment of his anceſtors to the Royal cauſe in the trying period of 1640, &c. and ſince they have, with leſs power, always been a very loyal family, though it has happened that their fortune has, from various cauſes, declined. The young gentleman, on whoſe behalf I write, is called Marchmont, and is the laſt of that ancient family. I am aſſured, and I believe from my own obſerva-

tions, that he is very well qualified for the undertaking, to which I beg leave to recommend him. I am told that his morals are irreproachable. He ſpeaks the French language perfectly, having reſided ſome years in France (where he has reſpectable connections), and has a competent knowledge of the Italian and German—a good taſte in the polite arts; and, in a word, I am taught to believe, that on farther enquiry you would find Mr. Marchmont eminently qualified to attend your ſon. I ſhall be happy in being inſtrumental in procuring him ſo honourable and fortunate an engagement; and have the honour to be,

"With the greateſt reſpect,

"Sir,

"Your moſt obedient humble ſervant,

"A. GISBOROUGH.

"Welbeck-Street,
Jan. 17th."

To this Sir Audley returned, with very little heſitation, the following anſwer:

 "MADAM,

"MADAM,

"You do at once juſtice to my principles, and to thoſe ſentiments which would render it extremely agreeable to me to obey the commands with which you have honoured me. It therefore gives me very great concern, that it is not in my power to engage the gentleman you mention as a tutor to Mr. Dacres. I believe he may be very deſerving; but circumſtances, which it is not neceſſary to recapitulate, make his reception into *my* family impracticable. Be aſſured, Madam, only the moſt inſuperable objections could weigh againſt the lively inclination I feel to pay deference to your recommendation, which confers a great obligation on us all.—I have the honour to be, with the higheſt eſteem and regard, Madam,

"Your moſt obliged, and
"Moſt faithful humble ſervant,
"AUDLEY DACRES.

"Upper Groſvenor Street,
Jan. 20th."

Thus, without aſſigning any reaſon, becauſe he was conſcious that he could not give the true one, he put an end to this ſolicitation on behalf of a young man who had in reality no other fault than that of being poor—though, with Sir Audley, he had undoubtedly another.—It had been ſurmiſed, that the father of Lady Dacres, who was one of that race of beings which, were the rich ever called by their true names, would have been denominated an *uſurer*, had taken, by means of an attorney who was entruſted to tranſact his buſineſs, ſome very unfair advantages of the neceſſities of the elder Marchmont; and that the eſtates, of which Sir Audley had become poſſeſſed in conſequence of that tranſaction were by no means ſo honeſtly come by, or ſo clear in the title by which he held them, as a very ſcrupulous man might have wiſhed. Young Marchmont, who dreaded the diſtreſs of his mother and his ſiſters, but

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was indifferent to his own, had never appeared conſcious of this unfair dealing, but had, on the contrary, endeavoured to conciliate Sir Audley, that he might leave the family a little longer in poſſeſſion of their houſe in Surry; but Sir Audley, notwithſtanding he had not himſelf been the inſtrument, felt, in enjoying the fruit of iniquity, that he hated the perſon injured as much as if he had himſelf been the aggreſſor.—Strange! that the conſciouſneſs of having injured, or participated in an injury, ſhould create, in the human mind, ſo much malignity againſt the ſufferer! Yet ſo it always is.

Sir Audley, however, by no means allowed, even in arguing the matter with himſelf, that Marchmont had any cauſe of complaint—and he diſliked him, not only for this latent reaſon, which, though he repelled it, lurked in his mind, but becauſe, though poor, he ſeemed to conſider himſelf ſtill in his former rank,

and

and even when aſking a favour, (as he did when he ſolicited his mother's continuance in the Surry houſe) it was leſs like a dependant than an equal. Sir Audley, accuſtomed ſince he had lived among place-men to a very different conduct from thoſe who had any thing to aſk, could not reconcile himſelf to this manly bearing; and between one cauſe of diſlike and another he hated Marchmont heartily—and never ſpoke of him but in terms of contempt and diſpleaſure.

But the conſequence of this repulſe was much more material to Marchmont than merely the loſs of an appointment, which, had he known it was with a ſon of Sir Audley's, he would not have ſolicited, or, had it been procured, have accepted; it deprived him of every hope of ſucceſs in his purſuit of a tutorſhip—for Mrs. Giſborough, who, together with ſome of her friends, had undertaken to befriend him, and who were very likely

to

to ſucceed, no ſooner canvaſſed Sir Audley's letter than they concluded that their zeal was miſplaced, and that ſomething was undoubtedly wrong in the character of this young man, of which Sir Audley was too generous to ſpeak, yet which was undoubtedly of a nature that rendered it impoſſible for them to hazard committing themſelves by recommending him.—When therefore he came from an obſcure lodging in Surry, where he lived with his mother and ſiſters, to know the event of an application which Mrs. Giſborough had informed him ſhe had made, without telling him to whom, he was met by a very cold letter from that lady, who, without ſeeing him, contented herſelf with that method of letting him know, "That her application had failed, and that ſhe was ſorry to ſay ſhe believed it would not be in her power, or that of the friends to whom ſhe had ſpoken, to ſerve him in the way they had hoped."

Marchmont

Marchmont wanted not diſcernment to ſee that this was only a civil way of the lady's relieving herſelf from all farther trouble; he returned dejected to his family, to whom, however, he made light of his diſappointment, that he might not inflict new anguiſh on the half-broken heart of his mother.

But when he ſat down ſeriouſly to conſider his ſituation, this diſappointment, which followed ſo many others, fell cold and heavy on his ſpirits. The creditors had threatened to arreſt the remains of his father as they were proceeding towards the pariſh church of Eaſtwoodleigh; and Marchmont, in the agony of his mind, had entered into perſonal engagements to ward off ſo cruel a blow: ſubſequent diſcoveries of the condition of his father's affairs had rendered it impoſſible for him ever to acquit himſelf of theſe engagements from the effects that were left. Nothing therefore remained for him but to attempt,

tempt, by ſome exertions of his own, to ſatisfy the inexorable men to whom he was now perſonally bound; and who, provoked by their loſſes, declared their reſolution to impriſon him, unleſs ſome proſpect opened which might enable him to diſcharge the debt he had thus taken upon himſelf.

To leave England therefore, and to eſcape from their threats and importunities, while he hoped to obtain, as a tutor, a ſalary which he might divide between them and his family, was his moſt earneſt wiſh. But even this humble hope was now fruſtrated; and though he appeared calm and compoſed before his mother, who watched his countenance with the moſt anxious ſolicitude, he almoſt for the firſt time felt what it was to look back on the paſt without having one crime with which to reproach himſelf, yet forward to the future without a hope, and almoſt without a friend!

Generous

Generous and candid himſelf, and reſpecting men only for their worth and their talents, he had never till now been thoroughly convinced that, with the generality of the world, there is no crime ſo unpardonable as poverty; and that, when an untitled family fall to decay, their pretenſions to anceſtry, far from giving them a claim to commiſeration, become ridiculous in the opinion of the ſuddenly fortunate.—He, who might truly be ſaid to be

"Of gentle blood, part ſhed in honour's cauſe,"

POPE.

was now purſued for the ſum of ſeven hundred pounds, by a man who called himſelf a gentleman, but was, in fact, a money-lender, the ſon of a taylor; and haraſſed by another for a thouſand pounds, who had been an auctioneer, but who, having amaſſed a conſiderable ſum of money, had quitted the hammer, and was become a banker.

Theſe

Theſe men, while they deſpiſed the indigence of poor Marchmont, and thought, like Briggs, "that a pedigree pays no debts," had yet taken it into their heads, that a young man ſo well connected would not be ſuffered to remain in priſon, and that, if they threatened him with ſuch an exertion of the power they had acquired over him, they ſhould obtain at leaſt ſome part of the money for which he had engaged himſelf.—It was in vain that he aſſured them, that of his father's houſe he was the laſt—while of the ruined fortunes of that houſe they could not be ignorant; that as to the relations of his mother, though two of her ſiſters had married men of high rank, he was ſo far from having any intereſt with them, that he was not even by ſight known to any of his maternal relations.

Far from ſoftening the hearts of his purſuers by this repreſentation of his circumſtances, he found that the more deſperate

deſperate his ſituation was, the leſs they ſeemed inclined to forbearance.—Tormented every day by ſome new plan of the one (who, being himſelf a ſchemer, fancied that Marchmont might relieve himſelf by ſome project), and perplexed by the threats of the other, he found that he muſt conceal himſelf from the perſecution of both, or that they would inevitably avail themſelves of that moſt improvident law, which enables a creditor to impriſon the debtor who cannot pay him when he is at liberty;—as if an unhappy man, torn from his friends, deprived of his credit, depreſſed in his talents, and probably ruined in his health, could do more to pay his debts, than when he is at liberty to purſue his intereſt, or make the moſt of his induſtry—a law which confounds innocence with guilt, and equally puniſhes intentional fraud and inevitable misfortune; yet which exiſts no where in ſuch force

force as in a country boasting of its enlarged humanity and perfect freedom.

Such was the sad fate of Marchmont, that though guilty of no crime, and though he had devoted himself to distress from the purest motives of integrity and filial piety, he now found himself pursued like a felon, and had the horrors of perpetual confinement before his eyes.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

The tenant of a night-haunted ruin!

ACCUSTOMED inſenſibly to her ſolitude, Althea paſſed her time without murmuring. Her mind compelled thus to exert its ſtrength at ſo early a period, and her education having been ſuch as had not enfeebled while it ornamented her excellent underſtanding, ſhe not only became reconciled to a ſituation which to moſt young women would have been intolerable, but every day learned to rejoice at the election ſhe had made, and compare the melancholy tranquillity of her preſent ſituation with the ſplendid wretchedneſs to which an union with

with Mohun would have condemned her. Believing that, unleſs ſhe could ſell herſelf to ſome equally odious connection, the ſmallneſs of her fortune and the peculiar circumſtances of her ſituation (held down as ſhe was by the ſelfiſh policy of Lady Dacres) would prevent her ever marrying, ſhe thought of paſſing her life, if not always in as ſolitary a manner as ſhe now lived, yet certainly in a ſingle ſtate; and when ſhe recollected all her aunt was, ſhe thought of this rather with complacency than regret. Without predilection in favour of any one (for the infant preference ſhe had felt for Marchmont could hardly be called ſo), ſhe tried to look forward with cheerfulneſs to the few and ſimple duties that in ſuch a ſituation, and with ſo ſmall a fortune, ſhe had to fulfil. There is no ſtate of life in which objects for ſuch duties may not be found; but none more forcibly attracted her benevolence than the poor old woman Mrs. Moſely, to whoſe cot-

tage

tage her lonely rambles were the moſt frequently directed, and who was become her regular penſioner.

This little hut, for it was hardly more, conſiſting of only two ſmall rooms on the ground, and two of the ſame ſize under the thatched roof, was now by the bounty of Althea rendered as comfortable as it would admit of, and the general condition of its inhabitant much ameliorated. Yet while this poor helpleſs being inceſſantly bleſſed the conſiderate kindneſs of her young benefactreſs, Althea obſerved ſomething in her manner which indicated ſome preſſure of the mind—ſomething that ſeemed not to belong to fear of *future* poverty, and ſhe was in no immediate want; but, on the contrary, acknowledged herſelf to be ſurrounded with many and unexpected comforts. There were however, at times, ſuch ſymptoms of a pre-oecupied mind, or ſome peculiar intereſt affecting it, in the deportment of Mrs. Moſely, that

Althea was ſometimes tempted to doubt whether ſhe was not, as the people of the country believed, privy to ſome ſecret. Yet of what nature could it be? That ſhe was acquainted with a concealed treaſure buried ſomewhere in the domains of her ancient maſter, ſeemed very improbable; ſince the Marchmont family could not have been reduced to diſtreſs, had they poſſeſſed ſuch a reſource; and that the indigence of poor Mrs. Moſely herſelf was but too real, there were proofs enough.—Yet why did ſhe ſometimes, when Althea was with her, ſtart at every ſound, appear hurried, breathleſs, and confuſed; look eagerly from her little window, and with difficulty command herſelf ſo as to ſhew that attention the preſence of her benefactreſs demanded? Althea often attempted to diſcover the cauſe of all this, but was obliged to content herſelf with the excuſes Mrs. Moſely made; that it was owing to the terrors and hurries ſhe had

had gone through during the latter part of her ſervice in Mr. Marchmont's family, and the poverty ſhe had felt and dreaded ſince.

Beſides this ſolitary penſioner, Althea had ſoon a little humble circle, to whom the goodneſs of her heart prompted her to render a thouſand kind offices: ſhe had not indeed much money, but for herſelf ſhe wanted ſo little, that ſhe could without imprudence clothe the half-naked infants of one poor cottager, relieve by a trifling weekly allowance the helpleſs ſuperannuated father of another, pay a nurſe for attending the wife of a third, and purchaſe flax or wool for the induſtrious family of a fourth. For ſome ſhe worked herſelf, others ſhe inſtructed how to work; and ſhe was always ready to liſten to the ruſtic tale of ſorrow, and to give (what the poor do not always find) compaſſion and attention, even when it was not in her power greatly to

alleviate the diſtreſſes to which ſhe liſtened.

The children of her hoſt became the peculiar objects of her generous care. One of them was a little boy of about five years old, who attached himſelf to her with ſo much ſimple affection, that he followed her in all her walks, and crept continually into her room when ſhe was alone; where, if he thought ſhe was buſy, and would not like to be interrupted, he ſat himſelf ſilently down in a corner, and remained quiet till ſhe gave him leave to ſpeak to her.

This boy then became of courſe peculiarly her favourite; and ſhe not unfrequently found in the ſound of his innocent voice a relief againſt the ſilence of her dreary habitation, when Mrs. Wansford was buſied in her domeſtic concerns at a diſtance in the houſe, and her huſband abſent, or working as he often did when he was able, in that part of

of the old garden in which he raiſed a few vegetables for his family.

At theſe times it not unfrequently happened that the children attended their parents, or that the elder girl was ſent on meſſages; and then there reigned a ſilence ſo dreary around the houſe, that Althea ſometimes went out merely to hear a human voice. If any ſounds broke this profound repoſe, they were only ſuch as impreſſed melancholy ideas. The ancient dove-houſe, mark of former manorial dignity, had long ſince fallen to decay; but Wansford had nailed up ſome boards within the ſhelter of one of the thick buttreſſes, and the hoarſe cooing of the few pigeons re-echoed round them. The rooks, long ſince driven from their flouriſhing colony in a wood of tall elms that *once* ſhaded the houſe, now ſeemed as they ſlowly ſailed over it to regret their abandoned reſidence. Sometimes a flight of ſea-fowl clamoured amid the billowy

clouds; and when the wind blew from the ſouth-weſt, the heavy waves were heard breaking monotonouſly on the ſhore, or diſtinctly in the ſtillneſs of night in low and hollow murmurs;—while, within the houſe, the leaſt breath of air hummed and ſung along the paſſages, and through the crevices of doors faſtened up, producing ſuch effects from various currents, and confinement, as, aided by an imagination addicted to ſuperſtition, might have been magnified into low ſighs and half-ſtifled complaints.

The ſullen vibrations of a clock which belonged to Wansford, and was placed near the door of what they now called the kitchen, was plainly heard in the room where Althea ſat; and the melancholy meaſure of time was not to her the leaſt unpleaſant ſound that broke the ſolemn ſilence of which ſhe felt the drearineſs. She ſeldom, however, gave way to the dejection which moſt young perſons would have yielded to, but drove

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it away, ſometimes by having recourſe to her books (for ſhe had now received and arranged them), and ſometimes by playing one of thoſe ſimple airs, in which ſhe particularly excelled, though ſhe was not a very great proficient in muſic.

Now, however, arrived the very long evenings of December, and beginning of January, when Wansford happened to be confined to his bed by the rheumatiſm, and his wife attending on him; ſo that the part of the houſe where Althea's ſitting-room was ſituated was of an evening quite deſerted, except by the ſervant girl, who remained alone in the kitchen, often trembling when ſhe remembered the ſtories ſhe had heard, and looking fearfully towards the door every time the wind ſhook the old looſe boards and ruſty lock.

On theſe nights it was that Althea ſometimes found all her fortitude and philoſophy almoſt unequal to repel the comfortleſs ſort of feeling that aſſailed

her. It was not fear, for the moment ſhe began to reaſon with herſelf ſhe knew that every kind of fear was groundleſs and ridiculous. From ſupernatural agents ſhe could have nothing to apprehend, did they really exiſt; but againſt their exiſtence it was with her an unanſwerable argument, that the Director of the world would never violate a known law of nature to anſwer no poſſible end. Of the intruſion of any living being there was almoſt as little probability; for what temptation could there be for the nocturnal robber in a houſe where there was very little more than the ſimple furniture neceſſary for a peaſant's family? Notwithſtanding all this reaſoning, however, Althea earneſtly wiſhed for the return of more cheerful days; and caſt many a wiſtful look towards the ſea, which on a clear day was viſible from ſeveral of the windows of the houſe; and to which ſhe fancied her walks might be extended.

It was only during the long and gloomy evenings that ſhe felt diſtreſſed by the loneline ſs and ſeclu ion of her ſituation. In the day-time ſhe had not a moment unoccupied; and when the weather was ſuch as would not allow her to make her village viſits—

For "now the fields were dank, the ways were mire,"
MILTON.

ſhe not unfrequently had recourſe to the great banqueting-room up ſtairs, where, taking her little companion with her, ſhe walked ſome hours for exerciſe. Yet it was certainly not ſuch as greatly exhilarated her ſpirits; for Marchmont, his diſperſed and diſtreſſed family, his blaſted and ruined fortunes, were continually preſent to her mind; and while little Wansford, mounted on a ſtick, gamboled backwards and forwards before her, ſhe figured to herſelf what Mrs. Moſely had formerly deſcribed to her, the infancy of that unfortunate young man, when in

theſe then ſplendid rooms he was the firſt object of his doting parents, who gazed at him with prophetic fondneſs, as the future ſupport — as one who was likely even to increaſe the reſpectability, of their ancient family. A month or ſix weeks paſſed nearly in the ſame way. It was late in the month of February, when the weather having been ſtormy for many days, Althea found herſelf languid and unwell; and believing that exerciſe would relieve her from an oppreſſive pain in her head, ſhe took the child with her, not being in ſpirits to encounter the wide ſolitude of the apartments alone; and with a book reſorted to the banqueting-room, which might indeed have been as well called a gallery.

Here ſhe continued to walk for ſome time, till another heavy wintry ſtorm coming on, it became ſuddenly ſo dark, that ſhe was returning haſtily to her own room; when glancing her eyes towards the

the great folding door which led to the ſtair-caſe, half of which was open, ſhe fancied that ſome living creature ran haſtily by. It ſeemed to be a dog—yet there was none about the houſe but a large white maſtiff, uſually chained up in the yard: this, whatever it was, was not ſo large an animal; and Althea, with ſomething like fear mingling with curioſity, went to the door; and looking along the paſſage (now almoſt entirely dark) that led to thoſe apartments of which ſo terrific an idea had been entertained, ſhe thought ſhe ſaw the ſame creature run ſwiftly along, but ſhe immediately loſt ſight of it—it diſappeared down another paſſage; and Althea had no inclination to trace it farther, though ſhe felt a conſiderable deal of ſurpriſe. She now haſtened down the ſtairs, not without looking involuntarily behind her: ſhe ſaw nothing, however, and in ſome agitation reached her own room.

A moment's reflection reſtored her to compoſure. Of what was ſhe afraid?—and how was it extraordinary that a ſtray dog ſhould wander into a houſe in ſo ruinous a condition as were almoſt all the uninhabited parts of this? She endeavoured by ſuch reflections to drive from her mind a circumſtance that was certainly of no conſequence: but ſtill it returned to her, and ſhe found the recollection of it attended with ſome kind of regret, for ſhe no longer felt diſpoſed to take her melancholy walks in the gallery: and this added another deprivation to the many ſhe was compelled already to ſubmit to; for, gloomy as theſe were, they procured a ſort of change in bad weather, which it was unpleaſant to relinquiſh. But now a dread hung about her which ſhe could not immediately conquer, though ſhe was aſhamed of owning that ſhe felt it even to herſelf.

This

This was perhaps increaſed by Mrs. Wansford's telling her a day or two afterwards, that as ſhe was ſitting up with her huſband, who after a violent paroxyſm of the rheumatiſm had fallen into a doſe, ſhe had either heard, or fancied ſhe heard, amid the profound ſtillneſs of the night, the ſlow light ſteps of ſome perſon walking about the houſe.

"Once, Ma'am," ſaid ſhe, "to be ſure I thought it muſt be you coming out of your room, the ſteps ſeemed ſo near; and I was afraid you were ill, and I was going to open the door to ſee—but juſt at that moment my heart ſomehow miſgave me; I ſtopped a little to liſten, and I could almoſt ſwear that I heard whatever it was go ſoftly, ſoftly, and lightly along the back paſſage, and go to the rooms where my huſband puts our malt and hops. Then I was ſure it could not be you; and my heart was up in my mouth! I am ſure at the time I thought I had never heard ſuch an unaccountable

able noiſe ſince I have been in this houſe.—But, after all," continued ſhe, pauſing, "after all, perhaps, it might be only fancy."

"I dare ſay it was nothing more," ſaid Althea; "perhaps you were fatigued, and worn with anxiety; and when that is the caſe, we are apt to give way to fears and fancies that would never at another time be indulged."

"I ſhould not have thought ſo much, perhaps, of it," reſumed Mrs. Wansford, "but that Tiger has been ſo reſtleſs of nights lately, that it has been impoſſible for me and the girl to make him quiet. He has flown round the houſe as if he was mad—then back again—and barking ready to tear up the ground. My huſband was waked by him once or twice out of a ſound ſleep; and I told him what a taking the dog was in, and that I was quite frighted at it, and was afraid it would fright you. But Wansford ſaid it was nothing but nonſenſe; that there

was no reaſon for fear, and that he was ſure it was only a fox, or ſome vermin about the houſe, that made Tiger rave ſo. Sometimes, indeed, in hard weather, we have had foxes come quite into the houſe, as it were, after our poultry; and perhaps it might be the caſe now."

"It might be a fox that paſſed the door," thought Althea; "for why into ſo lonely and deſerted a place ſhould not ſuch an animal come for ſhelter? It may be one of them that traverſes theſe deſolate rooms of a night." Althea thought of the verſe in Iſaiah—

> "But the wild beaſt of the deſert ſhall lie there, and their houſes ſhall be full of doleful creatures."

"Alas!" added ſhe, with a ſigh, "what has this unfortunate family of Marchmont done, that their venerable abode, ſanctified by the long ſufferings of loyalty, ſhould be under this cruel malediction?"

The

The ſolution, however, that ſhe had now received of the cauſes of thoſe ſlight diſturbances which had alarmed her, quieted the diſagreeable ſenſations ſhe had felt, and inſenſibly the impreſſion they had made wore away. Notwithſtanding the advanced ſeaſon, the weather now became ſo ſevere, as to take from her all diſpoſition to return even to the walk in the banqueting-room. From her poor old penſioner ſhe was for ſome time excluded; for the ſnow was deep, and to reach her cottage was difficult till the way was beaten—difficulties which Mrs. Moſely could by no means encounter to come to her. Althea, therefore, was obliged to content herſelf with ſending the ſervant girl with a ſupply of proviſions, and an enquiry after the ſolitary inhabitant of the cottage, which ſhe continued to repeat for a few days.

When Althea herſelf aſked this girl after Mrs. Moſely, her anſwers were ſuch as might be expected; but it happened

pened that paſſing one day into the kitchen to enquire for her return, ſhe heard her ſay in her Devonſhire dialect to Mrs. Wansford, who was buſied there in preparing ſome food for her huſband, "I declare I cannot think what iz coom to the ould wewman—ſhe ſeems always tew much in a fluſter to ſend back any mezzage to Miſs, zoomhow."

"But ſhe was very thankful," ſaid Mrs. Wansford, "was ſhe not, for Miſs's goodneſs?"

"Yes, ſure!" anſwered Hannah, "but, Lord! mythinks ſhe is vaſtly odd az it twere. Then it is az hard to get tew her az if ſhe was a lady herſelf. She've creeped away out of the rewm wher ſhe uſed for to be, intew another little beck rewm, and the dewce at all can I make her hear, ſhe's few diff. I ſaid tew her that I had tewk'd down ever ſo much of our *cloom**, with things as ſhe had had,

* Crockery ware, or glaſs.

and

and that yew had ſent for it, ſo ſhe ſaid I might take back what I whewld; ſhe coonet no hew tell one from tother—So——"

"The poor old woman is not well then?" ſaid Althea, as ſhe entered the room.

Hannah, colouring at having been thus overheard, and afraid that Althea might be offended, anſwered confuſedly, "No, Miſs; ſhe be'ent ſick, but ſhe ſeems ſomehow in trouble."

"I will go myſelf to-morrow," ſaid Althea; "I ſuppoſe the weather affects her, poor creature!"

She afterwards made ſome other enquiries, whether ſhe had ſufficient firing, and whether the path to the cottage was practicable, and then returned to her employments.

One of theſe had lately been the ſtudy of that period of Engliſh hiſtory when the Marchmont family had been ſo diſtinguiſhed by its ſufferings and fidelity; for

for this point of time had now, from her ſituation in the ſcene of many of the events that had occurred, and from her favourable opinion of the unfortunate ſucceſſor to the virtues, and, alas! to the misfortunes of theſe loyaliſts, acquired particular intereſt in the opinion of Althea.

In the courſe of her education ſhe had gone through the hiſtory uſually put into the hands of young people. Her underſtanding was equally clear and ſolid, and her memory remarkably retentive; yet a very young perſon uſually reads the ſucceſſion of monarchs, and the hiſtory of battles at a remote period, ſo much more as a taſk than a pleaſure, that now her ripened reaſon gave to her preſent ſtudy at leaſt the advantage of novelty. And that it might be every way profitable, ſhe began with the Saxon heptarchy. But uncertain accounts, mingled and debaſed with monkiſh legends, accounts of beings who,

who, with almoſt the ſingle exception of Alfred, were ſo far from being fit to reign, that they were not fit to live, could not long detain her; nor was her imagination much cheered by the rude attempts at poliſhing the half ſavage Anglo-Saxon by the fierce Norman invader. In following their line through, and thoſe of Plantagenet and Tudor, there is but little to ſoothe the mind. Ambition, the vice of great minds, is ſo degraded by ferocity, religion ſo perverted by ſuperſtition, the father is ſo often armed againſt the ſon, the child againſt the parent, the brothers againſt each other; ſo few of thoſe "charities" exiſted among them which alone render human nature reſpectable; and the people were ſo continually the victims of the hateful paſſions of their princes, that the reader rejoices to bring his obſervations down to later times, and hopes that when the period in which what is called the *art* of government becomes better

better underſtood, order, and of courſe happineſs, might be its effects. But from the *glorious* Queen Elizabeth, ſhe who is pronounced by Lord Bacon to be "*admirable among women, and memorable among princes*," to the wretched and degraded penſioner of Louis the Fourteenth (Charles the Second), there is hardly an interval that can be read with pleaſure by one who, inſtead of having formed ideas from the little abridged hiſtories ſo early put into the hands of children, dares to think for himſelf.

It was to this interval that the particular attention of Althea was turned. The firſt mention of the Marchmont family was in the reign of James the Firſt. But it was in that of his unhappy ſon that they became remarkable.

Althea had borrowed of Mrs. Moſely a copy of a ſort of memoir of the family begun by the grandfather, and continued by the father of Marchmont; of which a ſervant had been employed to make

two

two or three copies, and one of them had been given to Mrs. Mofely, which ſhe preſerved with great care, and which ſhe had put into Althea's poſſeſſion, with a long exordium on the eminence and conſequence of the perſons to whom it related.

To trace through the tumult of civil diſcord, and the bewildering ſubtleties of miſtaken politics, the bravery and perſevering loyalty of a ſingle family, was a taſk ſuited to the preſent ſtate of Althea's mind. It ſeemed like deſigning the different appearances of a beautiful tree, which, though now ſhorn of its moſt flouriſhing honours, preſented a fine and venerable form to the eye of the painter, and ſtill produced ſome fair and verdant branches, though its trunk was injured by time and accident.

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

His face moſt foul and filthy was to ſee,
With ſquinting eyes, contrary ways extended,
And loathly mouth, unmeet a mouth to be,
That nought but gall and venom comprehended,
And wicked words that God and man offended.

A SECOND fall of ſnow now rendered the project Althea had formed of enquiring herſelf after Mrs. Moſely impracticable. In this weſtern county indeed it lay leſs than in the more eaſtern, northern, or midland parts of England; but it had drifted ſo much againſt the banks and hedges, that the path to the cottage was again for her impaſſable.—The mild philoſophy of the young recluſe ſtruggled againſt the heavy depreſſion

preſſion which ſuch perfect ſeclusion, at a ſeaſon ſo dreary, could hardly fail to inflict; but her ſtudies were not much calculated to exhilarate her thoughts.—They led her from the detail of public calamity, to its effects on private life; from the misfortunes of the monarch to the conſequent miſeries of his ſervants—and the ſad conſequences of civil war on domeſtic happineſs.

From the then moſt reſpectable condition of a private country gentleman, that anceſtor of Marchmont, who firſt quitted it to attend a court, became perſonally attached to Charles the Firſt, while Prince of Wales; and afterwards, when theſe unhappy diſſenſions broke out between Charles and his Parliament, which ended in the deſtruction of monarchy, Mr. (afterwards Sir Armyn) Marchmont was one of the firſt men of property in the Weſt who declared for the King.

In

In the courſe of thoſe ſad years, which deluged the kingdom with blood, the ſecond of his three ſons and his only brother fell in the field. He did not ſurvive them long; and his eldeſt ſon yielding for a while to a torrent it was fruitleſs to reſiſt, and reſiding at Eaſtwoodleigh, it became an aſylum for the wandering and diſperſed royaliſts; while in rendering it ſuch he narrowly eſcaped ſharing their fate—and only by his being perſonally inactive, and by his popularity in his immediate neighbourhood. But when the ſon of the deceaſed monarch made his laſt effort at Worceſter, Mr. Marchmont (for, his father being only a knight, he had no title) attended him thither with a ſmall but choſen party of followers. After the event of that day, he returned, ſlightly wounded, towards home, and was for ſome time concealed in his own houſe. When it became ſafe to re-appear, he reſumed, with ſome precaution, his former way of

living; but by the ſad condition to which his friends were reduced, as well as the reſtraint he was himſelf compelled to live under, his ſpirits and health became ſo much affected, that he gradually ſunk into the grave, leaving his inheritance (impaired by fines, and the aſſiſtance he had ſent the exiled King) to the eldeſt of the infant ſons of his younger brother.

This young man, who at the Revolution was about five-and-twenty, unable to deny or to defend the miſconduct of James, yet deteſting from the influence of hereditary prejudice what he deemed the uſurpation of William, abſented himſelf entirely from public life; while his brother, who had entered early into the army, followed the fortunes of the miſguided monarch, to whom he had ſworn allegiance, and, marrying in France, became founder of that family with whom young Marchmont had ſome time reſided.

The

The next heir, the grandfather of Marchmont, would have acted wisely, had he remained a quiet spectator of the attempts that were made in the year 1715 to re-establish the banished family; but his zeal was so unguarded, that a considerable part of his own and his wife's fortune was hardly sufficient to save him from the consequences of his open adherence to the "good old cause."

But not less bigoted to principle, in pursuance of which he could not act but at the risk of his whole fortune, he educated his children in the same ideas he himself entertained; and thirty years afterwards, in 1745, the family was reckoned so decidedly *Jacobite*, that their horses were seized at that period by the neighbouring Deputy-Lieutenant—and the same precaution was used in regard to him as with the Catholic gentlemen in the neighbourhood. Cut off from every advantage which the respectability of his family, or his own

talents, might have given him in public life, while his fortune was ſapped by the loans of his predeceſſors to their baniſhed friends, the father of young Marchmont ſaw himſelf, towards the middle of his life, ſurrounded by a family of three daughters and a ſon, with only a nominal fortune—for his eſtates were mortgaged for almoſt as much as they were worth. When once this happens, the very expedients that are employed to ward off the ruin, bring it on more rapidly. The laſt Marchmont lived only long enough to ſee the inevitable deſtruction of his houſe—to ſee the ſon he ſo paſſionately loved likely to become a deſtitute wanderer, and his wife and daughters deſtined to indigence.—His heart was broken, and his eyes cloſed on this cruel proſpect; while his unhappy ſon, by hazarding his perſonal liberty, reſcued, with difficulty, his poor remains from the inhuman gripe of the law.——

Such

Such was, in brief, the detail collected by Althea from the family memoirs, to which Mrs. Mosely's narrative served as a supplement. To read over the period of history with which the former account was intimately connected, occasioned, in the mind of Althea, wonder and pity. That there were men who adhered from principle, and still more from personal affection, to Charles the First, misled and obstinate as he was, she could easily conceive; but it was more difficult to account for the infatuation of those who sacrificed their families and their country to the degraded *pensioner* of *France*, and the unfeeling employer of *Jeffries*. Still there is something so respectable in the enthusiasm of even mistaken fidelity, something so impressive in the disinterested generosity of sacrificing every thing for an exiled and ruined family, that the ancestors of Marchmont became more than before

the objects of her veneration; and their unfortunate descendant, of her pity.

In dwelling frequently on this topic, the mind of Althea turned itself to enquire if nothing could be done to alleviate the melancholy fate of a family so worthy of more prosperous fortune.—She was herself, alas! a more isolated being than any of those whose destiny she lamented, and but very little richer. Yet she could not help frequently returning to consider whether there were no means of befriending them; but as often as she did so, difficulties arose that made her for a while relinquish the hope of being able to accomplish it.

How indeed was it possible for her to address her father on behalf of a family to whom she believed he had conceived some dislike, and with any part of which Sir Audley did not know she had the slightest acquaintance? or how could she apply to Mrs. Marchmont herself with

offers

offers of ſervice? Still, however, ſhe could not wholly diſmiſs the idea; and as it would be doing ſomething, ſhe determined to write to Miſs Everſley (with whom ſhe ſtill, though rarely, correſponded), and, making ſuch an excuſe for her curioſity as her local ſituation might well furniſh her with, aſk for ſome account of the preſent ſtate of the Marchmont family.

Althea then was ſet down to this letter, when, as was Mrs. Wansford's cuſtom, ſhe came into Althea's ſitting-room to make the enquiries of the morning after her health.—To thoſe Althea made in her turn—the good woman anſwered—"Ah, dear Ma'am! this weather is very ſad for my poor huſband—He gets hardly any better, and I am afraid he will be quite confined again.—I think more of it than I ſhould at another time, becauſe I don't know how I ſhould do to get advice for him; for I am ſure Mrs. Cookſon won't come

through ſuch a deep ſnow to him, if he ſhould be ever ſo bad——And then—to be ſure I am not afraid—but if any thing ſhould happen, my poor Wansford, cripple as he is, would be of no more uſe than one of the children."

"If any thing ſhould happen?" ſaid Althea.—"Why what can poſſibly happen, my good friend?"

"I thought," anſwered Mrs. Wansford, "to have kept it to myſelf; but I own I am not eaſy enough, for all my huſband laughs at me, to help telling you:—there certainly is ſomebody who can have no good deſign, about the houſe of a night."

"About the houſe?" cried Althea.

"Yes, my dear Miſs: for theſe three laſt nights the girl and I have traced the print of feet clear enough in the ſnow. The track goes round to the old bow window, at the back of the council-room, and there it is not ſo diſtinct. I cannot imagine, for my part, what any living

living mortal can want here. I am ſure there is no earthly thing for any body to take."

"It muſt be ſome perſons who come with a deſign on your poultry," ſaid Althea.

"I have never loſt even a ſingle chick," replied Mrs. Wansford: "beſides, in the name of goodneſs, what ſhould they do round there, if they came after the fowls? There is no track neither round the yard and outhouſe.—My huſband laughs at it indeed, and ſays, What ſhould they come for?—I don't know what they come for, but I'm ſure they *do* come—and that is the reaſon why Tyger never ceaſed raving for ſome nights. I ſhut him up on Thurſday night in the kitchen; but even there he did nothing but growl all night long."

"Yet if any body had been in the houſe," ſaid Althea, "he would have

done more than growl—he would have run to the place."

"No," replied Mrs. Wansford; "he could not do that, for he could not get into the old part of the houſe. The doors above are all ſhut up, you know, and there is no way below. To be ſure I have not much notion what any body ſhould do there; but I firmly believe there are *travellers*, or ſome ſtrange people, that hide about the houſe—and I own it *does* fright me."

Althea now recollecting the dog, which ſhe had certainly ſeen, and feeling by no means delighted with the idea of *ſuch* neighbours as her hoſteſs deſcribed, could not help betraying ſome emotion in her countenance; yet unwilling to add to the terror which ſhe ſaw had taken poſſeſſion of Mrs. Wansford, ſhe forbore to ſay all ſhe thought, and only obſerved, that if ſuch was really her perſuaſion, it would be better to make

ſome

ſome enquiry into the matter, and to take ſome precaution againſt the danger that might follow.

"Why, ſo I have been telling Wansford," anſwered ſhe.—"But I declare he is quite provoking—he will inſiſt upon it, that 'tis nothing in the world but my fancy—or ſome accidental thing of no conſequence.—I wiſh, dear Ma'am, you would but ſpeak to him yourſelf—He won't tell *you* it is fancy, perhaps.—If you are not afraid of catching cold, do come out yourſelf, and ſee if there is not a track of feet as plain as can be."

To make this enquiry, Althea conſented; and it was indeed very evident that a perſon or perſons had gone as far as that part of the houſe deſcribed by Mrs. Wansford, but *there* ſeemed to have diſappeared. Yet there was no viſible way by which the houſe could be entered on that ſide.—Althea now propoſed to Mrs. Wansford to make ſome examination within ſide the houſe—but

ſhe declared herſelf afraid of going, unleſs ſome man could be found to accompany her—which ſhe ſaid it was not eaſy to do, as there was no perſon about the houſe who could go with her, and her huſband, beſides that he was diſabled by the rheumatiſm, became impatient whenever ſhe inſiſted upon there being any occaſion of alarm.—Althea, though far from feeling at this moment any extraordinary portion of courage, yet offered herſelf as an auxiliary: but the poor woman was too ſeriouſly frightened to explore the uninhabited rooms with ſo ſlender a guard; and Althea felt that on the approach of night ſhe ſhould be extremely uncomfortable, in the idea that there were near her beings of whom it was much more reaſonable to be afraid than of the departed family of the Marchmonts, who were the reputed inhabitants of that part of the houſe.

Night however came, and with it a ſudden thaw that obliterated at once all

all evidence of the fact of which Mrs. Wansford was so solicitous to convince her husband:—but the impression it had made on her mind, and on Althea's, was not so easily effaced; and Althea found it impossible to go to rest without having recourse to an expedient to which she was generally averse—that of the servant girl bringing her bed into the same room. The door was then as well secured as their united contrivances could effect, and Althea lay down without undressing herself.—The hours, however, passed quietly—there was no unusual noise about the house—and towards the middle of the night, though her thoughtless attendant was in a profound sleep, she went softly to the window, and by the light afforded by the moon, almost at full, yet often obscured by wandering clouds, she could see to some distance around. The view was not indeed on the same side of the house as that to which the footsteps had been traced, but it was

difficult

difficult for any perſon going from the neareſt villages to reach any quarter of the building without paſſing along ſome part of the ground ſhe could now ſurvey. She ſaw, however, neither animal nor human being—and ſuppoſed that, with whatever deſign theſe intruders had before approached, the lightneſs of the night had now deterred them.—Again ſhe wearied herſelf with conjectures, and again deſiſted; for ſhe found no way of accounting for ſuch an appearance, but by ſuppoſing that the deſign was to rob: yet why ſhould ſuch a riſk be incurred, where there was ſo certainly nothing to take?

Her apprehenſions kept her ſleepleſs till the morning broke: ſhe then ſunk into forgetfulneſs; and it was not till ſome time after her uſual hour that ſhe went down into her parlour to breakfaſt.

As ſhe ſeldom rang the bell that Wansford had contrived to mend for her, ſhe was going herſelf into the

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ſort of kitchen where he and his family uſually ſat, to aſk for her breakfaſt; when ſhe was met in the paſſage by Mrs. Wansford, who, with a look of diſmay, ſaid—"Dear Ma'am, I was coming to ſee for you. There are two ſuch ſtrange-looking men along with my huſband!—and they are aſking ſuch a number of odd queſtions!—I cannot, for my life, imagine what they want."

Althea, whoſe imagination was ſtill full of the track that had been ſeen in the ſnow, fancied that theſe might be the perſons who clandeſtinely viſited the houſe; but as their coming now was a direct contradiction to their motives for coming before, ſhe recollected herſelf, and aſked Mrs. Wansford what ſort of people they were?

"That is more than I can tell you, I'm ſure," replied the good woman.—"For my part, I do not know what to make of them, and I can ſee Wansford knows as little: however, he keeps civil

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to them.—I wiſh you would come in, my dear Miſs, as 'twere by chance."

"I'll come, certainly," ſaid Althea, alarmed, though ſhe knew not why.—"But they cannot be people that want me?"

Then, impelled by fear and curioſity, ſhe entered the room, but inſtantly ſhrunk back, for the figures of the two men, who ſat oppoſite Wansford, terrified her.

Neither of them aroſe at her entrance, though *her* appearance was certainly ſuch as demanded that mark of reſpect from perſons of theirs.—One of them was a ſhort mean figure between fifty and ſixty, wrapped in an old blue great coat with a red cape, and he wore a carroty ſcratch wig pulled forward over a face which could not, without an affront to the ſpecies, be called human. Squalid and deſpicable as this wretch was, he ſeemed to be inveſted with ſome authority over the other; whoſe great athletic

athletic figure impreſſed terror, while that of his companion raiſed abhorrence. This ſecond man had a broad red face, deeply ſcarred with the ſmall-pox, with a black patch acroſs his forehead; greaſy ſhock hair, and a ſhabby coarſe ſurtout, which altogether anſwered ſo completely to the idea ſhe had formed of a ruffian, that Althea had, at the moment, no other expectation but that one of theſe men would confine Wansford, while the other robbed the inhabitants of the houſe.

Such were the alarming figures that, on the appearance of Althea, ſeemed, with renewed eagerneſs, to purſue the enquiry, whatever it was, that they were making of Wansford; who, confuſed and alarmed by interrogations he did not underſtand, ſeemed very deſirous of getting rid of his unwelcome viſitors, yet afraid of offending them.

Althea, unable to ſuſtain for a moment the inſolent looks of the man laſt deſcribed,

deſcribed, hurried back into her parlour—Mrs. Wansford, in increaſed diſmay, following her:

"Dear Ma'am," ſaid ſhe—"what do you think of theſe men? what can they be?—and what can they poſſibly want?"

"I have never ſeen bailiffs, or their followers," ſaid Althea; "but I ſhould fear, from the deſcription I have heard of ſuch people, that theſe are ſome ſuch men."

"Bailiffs!" exclaimed Mrs. Wansford, turning as pale as aſhes, "what can bailiffs want with my huſband?—Mercy upon me!—He does not, I am ſure, owe any body five pounds in the world—and I am *as* ſure he has never done any harm in his life.—Oh, my God! what is going to happen to him?"

The poor woman, who had eagerly ſeized on this alarming notion, was now ſo overcome with it, that ſhe could not ſtay in the room; but notwithſtanding the terror with which the ſight of the men

men affected her, she was hastening back to that where they were with her husband, when in the passage, feeling his way with his cane, for he was half blind, the elder of the horrid-looking wretches met her.—Wansford, with a mixture of fear and indignation in his countenance, followed him, though so lame that he went on crutches.—Shocked and amazed at his approaching her, Althea had no power to move from the place where she stood. The man, stalking slowly up quite close to her, while she shrunk from his approach, in a loud and slow voice, whose sound would alone have conveyed a perfect idea of the hideous monster that uttered it, thus spoke—"I understand, Madam, that . . . you . . . are . . . the . . . daughter . . . of . . . Sir Audley . . . Dacres, . . . Ba-ro-net,—proprietor of this house.—These people then are your servants?"

"And who are you, Sir," said Althea, collecting all her courage, "that, knowing

knowing to whom this houſe belongs, and who *I* am, take the liberty of thus intruding?"

"My buſineſs . . ." began the wretch again.

"Your buſineſs cannot be with me, nor with Sir Audley's ſervants—They do not know you—I beg you will go from hence."—The man, who found by the trembling of her voice that ſhe was terrified, now thought that he ſhould prevail by mere dint of fear: ſtriking therefore his cane againſt the ground, he ſaid in a ſtill louder tone—"Underſtand, Madam, that I am *authoriſed* in what I demand, and . . . ."

"For God's ſake!" cried Althea, ſpeaking to Wansford, "what does he want?"

"He inſiſts, Miſs, upon being allowed to ſearch the houſe. I have refuſed him; for why?—I'm ſure by his looks he don't ſeem an honeſter man than they he pretends to ſearch after—

and

and what if he was?—He has got no right to ſearch here—or if he has, why don't he ſhew it me?—why don't he ſhew his warrant?—But, inſtead of that, he won't even tell me who he looks after!—Come, come, Mr. What's-your-name, come out of my young lady's room, or I'll ſhew you that, lame as I am, I'll not let any ſuch fellows fright her."

"I would explain to the lady," ſaid the diſguſting wretch, regardleſs of this remonſtrance—"firſt, what my demands are—ſecondly, the authority with which I am inveſted—thirdly, the grounds of my proceeding—fourthly, the conſequence of reſiſting."

"I will hear nothing, Sir," exclaimed Althea; "I will not hold any converſe with you. I am perfectly convinced that a perſon of *your* appearance can have no buſineſs in this houſe, and I muſt inſiſt upon your leaving it."

"My

"My appearance!" muttered the horrid fiend—"my appearance! I ſee, I ſee how it is; here is colluſion.—I ſay, man," (turning to Wansford) "that I will execute my duty—I will examine the other part of the houſe."

"And I ſay," cried Wansford, ſeizing him by the collar with one hand, while he ſupported himſelf with the other, "that you ſhall go out of that part of it where you are already." So ſaying, by the application of all his ſtrength he jerked the man into the paſſage; Mrs. Wansford, dreading leſt his follower ſhould fall upon her huſband, followed trembling and crying; while Althea, who had never ſuffered ſuch an alarm in her life before, ſhut the door of her room, and bolted it within.

She liſtened, and heard a ſcuffle in the kitchen, which increaſed her affright; yet ſhe knew not, in the confuſion of her thoughts, whether ſhe feared theſe people as common robbers, or as ruf-

fians

ſians authoriſed by law to hunt ſome unhappy perſon to deſtruction. The latter, though ſhe knew not whom they ſought, ſeemed to her more deteſtable than the former. Her preſent agitation, however, permitted her only to liſten in breathleſs ſuſpenſe: ſhe heard Wansford loudly inſiſt on their leaving the houſe, declaring he would ſue them if they dared to ſtay; while the old miſcreant preached aloud of his authority, and his power; and his follower, half-ridiculing and half-menacing Wansford, ſeemed determined to ſupport his employer. After this had laſted ſome time, to the increaſing terror of Althea, ſhe heard other voices interpoſe, which very plainly, but ſomewhat roughly, took the part of Wansford, and, as it ſeemed, added more forcible arguments than he had himſelf been able to bring forward; for the enemy were now expelled, and ſhe heard the governor of the fortreſs

engage

engage his auxiliaries to celebrate their victory in ſome of his beſt cyder.

When they were ſet down to do this, Mrs. Wansford appeared at the door of Althea's room, which was readily opened to her.

"Oh! my deareſt Miſs," cried ſhe, as ſhe entered—"Sure I never in all my whole life have been ſo frighted—and I am ſure you too muſt have been terrified!—Dear! how pale you look!—Let me get you ſomething."

"No," ſaid Althea—"I am very well now.—But tell me who theſe people are?—and how, at laſt, you got them out of the houſe?"

"Ah! as to who they *are*, I know no more than you do, Ma'am, but I know they wanted no good. Did any mortal ever ſee ſuch a frightful-looking wretch as the ruffian that came in here? My poor Wansford, cripple as he is, would never have got rid of them, if I had not bethought

bethought me of ſending Hannah down to the men at plough in lower park croft; I knew they'd ſoon clear the houſe of 'em; and ſo they did.—John Hedbury ſays they're both bailiffs—or one's a lawyer, and t'other a catchpole, 'tis much one; and he knows they've been about this country, and ſome more along with them, for three or four weeks—creeping about, and aſking this man, and aſking t'other man, what ſtrangers there were in theſe parts? Some of our neighbours were talking about theſe bad-looking fellows at the Nag's-Head, John ſays, but laſt Saturday night; ſome ſaid they were exciſemen, and ſome that they were ſpies—but another again ſaid he knew one of them—that old one; and he is a lawyer at Plymouth: John Hedbury mentioned his name, but I can't think of it now. Some thought, it ſeems, that the perſon they are hunting for is one that has run away with money from his maſter; ano-

ther gueſſed that it was a Jacobine, or Jacobite; I don't know, not I, what they call 'em; but Miller Clayfield ſaid he was ſure as could be, that it was ſome man in debt, and that this lawyer fellow had got a writ againſt him, and t'other was a bum bailiff."

"Still," ſaid Althea, "I do not comprehend why the ſearch of theſe purſuers ſhould be ſo particularly directed to this houſe?"

"Nor I neither, I am ſure. I cannot think why they ſhould come here indeed!—As my huſband told them, an Engliſhman's houſe is his caſtle, and he ſhould not have thought of their pretending to ſearch this; for though he was only a ſervant, he had as much right to keep out any ſuch dirty fellows as the firſt Lord of the land. We are no likelier than other folks to harbour bad people, and I'm ſure there are no people here; though, if there were, and it was only a poor man hiding for debt, I'm

ſure

ſure I'd never tell ſuch as them; for to help ſuch a one out of their clutches would be another thing."

"And do you know any body likely," ſaid Althea, "to want ſuch a friendly concealment? Perhaps Wansford does; and, unknown to you, may have taken ſome unfortunate perſon, thus purſued, into the houſe? Recollect, whether the noiſes you have heard, and the print of feet traced in the ſnow, which alarmed you ſo much, might not have ſomething to do with the perſon that theſe bailiffs ſay they would ſearch for?"

"Bleſs me! ſo they might, indeed!—And yet I cannot think, neither, that Wansford would do ſuch a thing without telling me. Beſides, who does *he* know? Here we live from one month to another, and not a living ſoul ever comes near us!—Beſides, how, if Wansford had done ſo, how could he carry the perſon victuals without my knowing it? Indeed, how could he carry it

at all? I never miſſed the value of a bit of bread. Where could ſuch a perſon, if one *was* hid in the houſe, where could he ſleep? There is no bed, I'm ſure, in it—as you muſt have ſeen, Miſs, when you went over it. Beſides, I'm certain my huſband would never do ſuch a thing without telling me."

"You remember, however," ſaid Althea, "that your huſband laughed off all your fears, and would believe nothing about the noiſes that you talked of—as if he had ſome reaſon for wiſhing to avoid enquiry."

Struck with this remark, yet unwilling to believe that Wansford could poſſeſs a ſecret he would not communicate to her, his wife now left Althea, determined to find out the myſtery, if there was one; while Althea, who could neither ceaſe her conjectures, nor fix on any that were probable,

probable, and whoſe ſpirits had been ſtrangely hurried by the people ſhe had ſeen, with difficulty compoſed her mind to follow the occupations of the day.

CHAP. IV.

Great enemy to this, and all the reſt
That in the garden of Adonis ſprings,
Is wicked Time, who with his ſcythe addreſt
Doth mow the flowering herbs and goodly things,
And all their glory to the ground down flings.

IN the courſe of the day Wansford related to Althea the converſation theſe men had held with him.

"They began," ſaid he, "by aſking me whether I knew this perſon and that perſon in the neighbourhood, and *who* lived in the houſe? and *who* came to the houſe? and ſuch a number of queſtions, that I could not tell, not I, what they would be at! Thinks I, you can't have any good reaſon, my maſters, for all this inquiſitiveneſs?

inquiſitiveneſs? You look very like catchpoles; I don't half like you, ſo you'll not get much out of me! From one thing to another, they began to tell me that they were employed by ſome very worthy gentleman to diſcover a perſon who had done him a very great injury, and was, they had reaſon to believe, concealed ſomewhere in this neighbourhood. The old fellow then ſaid, that, if they could find, and ſecure this man, but what his name was they did not chooſe to tell, they were to have a very conſiderable reward; and hinting that if I would help them, I ſhould have a ſhare, they deſired I would let them ſearch the houſe. For my part, I hate all attornies, having ſuffered enough once by one of them; and as to your bailiffs, and bailiffs' followers, I'd fain have ſuch raſcals dragged through the horſepond. So I told them that, whoever the perſon was that they wanted, I was very ſure he could not be at Eaſtwood-

leigh; but that, if he was, I'd ſee the whole tribe of ſpies and ſheriffs' officers at the devil, before I'd help one of them to take any poor fellow to priſon. Upon that, the old ſwivel-eyed chap began in his profing way to perſuade me, and, when he found that would not do, to threaten me. Then you, Ma'am, came in, and the impudent fellow thought, I ſuppoſe, he could frighten you into ordering me to do it. I never ſaw ſuch a ruffian. I believe, for my part, that it is Jack-Ketch himſelf: but Hedbury ſays his name is Vampyre; that he is an attorney, and has been the ruin of a great many families, for that he is the greateſt raſcal in all the country! If I catch him or the other blackguard about the houſe again, I'll ſhow them the way through the lower pond—that they may be ſure of."

Althea now very ſeriouſly enquired of Wansford, whether there were any grounds for believing that the unfortu-

nate

nate man, of whom theſe ſatellites of the law were in ſearch, was concealed about the houſe? Wansford, with every appearance of ſincerity, declared that there could be no ſuch circumſtance, he believed it impoſſible, and could not imagine what had given riſe to ſuch a notion.

Althea then mentioned to him the tracks of feet that had been ſeen in the ſnow.

"Yes," replied he, "my wife frightened herſelf ſtrangely about it; but, after all, what was it owing to? Theſe very men, depend upon it. Indeed, they as good as owned to me, that they had been about the houſe once or twice. I promiſe them, if they venture again, I ſhall ſhew them that there is more in the houſe than they bargain for. I'd no more mind ſhooting ſuch peſts to the world than a couple of mad dogs."

Althea thought that the bravery of Wansford was a little miſplaced, and

that it would have been better had he ſhewn more reſolution in preventing the elder of the men from the impertinence of addreſſing himſelf to her. Concealing however her thoughts, ſhe diſmiſſed her hoſt for the preſent, and attempted to loſe the uneaſy impreſſion that this ſtrange circumſtance had left: but it ſtill recurred to her mind; nor could ſhe forbear ſpeaking of it, and ſuggeſting ſuch ideas as aroſe about it, to Mrs. Wansford, who, after another day or two had elapſed, told her, that ſhe had taken every poſſible means to diſcover if Wansford was really engaged in concealing any one in the uninhabited parts of the houſe, and that ſhe was convinced he had not. Another and another day paſſed, in one of which Althea viſited her ancient friend at the cottage. The poor woman told her ſhe had kept her bed, and expreſſed in the warmeſt terms her gratitude for all the kindneſs ſhe had received. Althea obſerved none of that

confuſion and ſingularity in her manner of which the ſervant girl had ſpoken. She was low and languid; but, in ſo melancholy a ſtate of deſertion, with only the darkening proſpects of age, poverty, and ſickneſs before her, ſuch dejection was but too natural, and too common. Once or twice ſhe ſeemed to wiſh to ſay ſomething to Althea of more import than common complaints; and at length, on being encouraged to do ſo, ſhe ſaid, that as ſhe was ſure ſhe ſhould not outlive the winter, ſhe wiſhed ſhe could ſee her nephew, the only relation ſhe had, and that Althea would promiſe her, that, inſtead of being interred among the pariſh poor, ſhe ſhould be laid as near as poſſible, or as would be allowed, to the family burial place of the Marchmonts, and near her dear maſter, of whom when ſhe now ſpoke, ſhe ſeemed more affected than ever——But the old ſeldom weep!

Whatever was in Althea's power, ſhe promiſed with that genuine goodneſs of heart which marked all her actions. She offered too to write to the relation whom Mrs. Moſely thus named with ſolicitude, but learned that he was at a great diſtance in the ſervice of a gentleman, who would probably be unwilling to ſpare him; and that, if he would, the journey would be ſo expenſive, that it would be impoſſible for him to undertake it. To this unſatisfied wiſh, therefore, Althea could apply no remedy; but, leaving her penſioner in better ſpirits than ſhe found her, returned to her ſolitary home, with that ſelf-content which always follows the conſciouſneſs of doing good.

On entering the parlour ſhe found a letter on her table. It was from Linda Everſley; and after ſome details relative to perſons and affairs much leſs intereſting, the family of Marchmont was thus mentioned—

"You

"You enquire after thoſe unfortunate people the Marchmonts. I know but little of them, as my brother is always hurt if they are ſpoken of; but when I received your letter I ſhewed it to him. He ſaid, 'Tell Miſs Dacres, that if my poor friend knew how generouſly ſhe expreſſes an intereſt in his fate, I am perſuaded he would forget half its bitterneſs—for very greatly did he admire her, as indeed who does not? However, you may tell her too, Linda, that I hope he is ſomewhat leſs unfortunate than he has been; for after ſeveral unſucceſsful applications to become a tutor (one of which was to Sir Audley, offering to undertake the care of Mr. Dacres), he has at length found a ſituation in Ireland, not as a tutor, but with a nobleman who is improving and planting a conſiderable eſtate, which he has engaged Marchmont to ſuperintend. He is gone to Ireland, as I hear from his mother, who, with his ſiſters, remains where ſhe

did in Surry.' So far my brother's information goes.—Poor Marchmont! I agree with you, my dear Althea, that himself and his family are worthy of a better fate; for I am afraid Mrs. Marchmont and her daughters are in very uneasy circumstances. You know that my brother has more will than power to serve them, for his domestic unhappiness is not at all mitigated."

Miss Eversley then went into the history of her sister-in-law's vulgar tyranny. Althea hurried it over, as one of those incurable evils on which it is painful to dwell, and returned to lament the sad destiny of Marchmont and his family.

"How could my father," said she, "refuse to accept him for Mr. Dacres? Where would he have found a man better qualified? Her concern, that he was rejected, was equalled however by her surprise that he should apply to her father; and when she reflected on the former repulse he had met with, her

heart

heart bled to think how cruelly ſevere *that* preſſure of adverſity muſt be which had reduced his high ſpirit to ſubmit again to aſk a favour of Sir Audley.

If it had been poſſible to add to that undiminiſhed and acute regret with which Althea always thought of her loſt friend, her more than mother, it would have been increaſed by her now reflecting; that limited as was that excellent woman's power of giving pecuniary aſſiſtance, yet that her active humanity would probably have found the means of alleviating the ſufferings of Mrs. Marchmont and her children. Althea, in imagining all the mortifications, deprivations, and ſorrows of that extreme indigence in which they were repreſented to be, looked from the window where ſhe ſtood on the pile of building, of which only a part was ſeen, but a part magnificent even in ruins; ſhe caſt her eyes over the domain before it, denuded and changed as it was, and then

then tried to conceive what muſt be the virtue of thoſe who bore with patient fortitude ſo cruel a reverſe.

To theſe thoughts ſucceeded that regret, which what are called the pleaſures of life had never the power of exciting in the breaſt of Althea—that regret which aroſe from her inability to relieve the diſtreſſes ſhe deplored. Sometimes ſhe almoſt determined to write to Sir Audley, and beſeech him to be a friend to theſe unhappy people. Then ſhe dreaded his ſtern repulſe; and recollected how improbable it was that he, who would condemn to a kind of impriſonment his own child, only for refuſing to ſacrifice herſelf to proſpects of affluence and ambition, ſhould be prevailed upon, by any interceſſion, to intereſt himſelf for perſons who had no other claim upon him but *that* poverty which ſeemed in his opinion to be a crime.

Among

Among the various plans that Althea thus thought of and rejected, in regard to the mother and ſiſters of Marchmont, it at length occurred to her, that ſhe might obtain ſome information at leaſt about their preſent ſituation, if Mrs. Moſely would write to them; and this ſhe determined to propoſe, offering to act as her ſecretary—a means by which ſhe thought ſhe might introduce herſelf, without impertinence or impropriety, to their knowledge. This benevolent project ſhe put into execution the firſt day that was favourable for her walk: ſhe found on the part of Mrs. Moſely rather acquieſcence, than any expreſſion of pleaſure. "It was long," ſhe ſaid, "ſince ſhe had written to her dear ladies—ſhe knew not whether her doing ſo might not be troubleſome." Althea, however, over-ruled every ſlight objection; the letter was written; and ſhe returned home, flattering herſelf that ſome means would be found, by which ſhe might become

come uſeful to a family in whoſe deſtiny ſhe felt ſo deep an intereſt.

While ſhe expected an anſwer, which could not arrive in leſs than a week or ten days, Althea returned to her ſolitary amuſements. The weather was fine and mild for the ſeaſon; and her ſpirits were revived, even by that diſtant promiſe of returning ſpring, which is given in ſheltered ſituations ſo early as the middle of February. In that piece of ground which had once been a well cultivated garden, Althea had hitherto been deterred from walking, by its generally melancholy and ruinous appearance, when the bleak ſtorm of mid-winter, or its chilling ſnows, added to the gloom which neglect and deſolation ſpread over the place. But now the faint tinge of freſh green, which the ſpurges and ſome other early leaves lent to the ſpots of uncultivated earth (though mingled in many places with maſſes of fallen walls), were cheering to the ſight, and tempted

her

her to enquire if any of the ornaments of the garden had reſiſted "*Stern ruin's ploughſhare,*" which had ſo deeply paſſed over almoſt all the reſt of the place.

As no temptation had urged the ſpoilers to bear away the fruit-trees that lined the thick walls, they ſtill exiſted; and neglected and grown heavy with wood, as they were, a few red buds, nearly expanded, were here and there viſible. The ſurface of the broad gravel walk that encompaſſed the garden was now covered with moſs; and the borders, which were divided from it by box, grown into a low ragged hedge, produced only weeds, unleſs in two or three patches where the warm ſhelter of the projecting buttreſſes had induced Wansford to ſow ſome early vegetables. The eſpalier trees were almoſt timber; and the ſhrubs which had once been planted in a quarter behind them, as in a ſort of nurſery, were grown ſo large as to overſhadow them. At the corners of the croſs

croſs walks ſtood ancient heads of roſemary and lavender, overgrown with gray moſs, and ſerving as a ſort of ſpecimen of the ſtate of gardening in England when ſuch plants were cultivated with almoſt as much care as is now given to the tendereſt exotics.

In the centre of the garden was the carved pedeſtal of a large ſun-dial, but the plate was gone. From thence, a broad ſtraight walk, bordered with evergreens, of which only a few were alive, led to the ruins of a green-houſe, which Althea had been told opened into a pavilion, where, in the days of their proſperous fortune, the family of Marchmont uſed to entertain their company, or amuſe themſelves in the fine evenings of ſummer; for it looked into the pleaſanteſt part of the then park, where a ſmall river, pouring down from a high ridge of woodland, wound away to ſupply two large ponds within ſight of the windows: but the coppices were now cut down,

and

and the inconſiderable ſtream to the right loſt among tangled bruſh-wood, furze, and broom. The doors that led into this pavilion were now locked: the green-houſe windows had been taken out and ſold; and of the old orange-trees, and other plants ſo fondly cheriſhed by the late owner of the place, no traces remained, ſave two or three broken caſes producing funguſes, and mouldering into touch-wood. The few garden tools that Wansford poſſeſſed, and ſome parcels of garden ſeeds and dried herbs faſtened to the wall, were now all that was to be ſeen in this ſpacious place, once the abode of innocent pleaſure. Althea, comparing its appearance with that of a magnificent modern conſervatory, the property of a great contractor whoſe houſe near London ſhe had viſited with Lady Dacres, left it with a ſigh, and croſſed what once lay before the front windows as a parterre. Among the graſs and moſs that were now ſpread over it, a few crocuſes

crocuſes and hepaticas ſtill forced their way, and in two or three places the ſnow-drops had ſpread themſelves ſo thickly as to ſilver the ground in deſpite of obſtructing weeds. Penſively philoſophizing, Althea gathered ſome of them: they were hardly blown; but one of the little Wansfords, now running up to her, aſked her leave to gather a few alſo, and then to dig ſome up, and put them in a pot to carry into the houſe. This childiſh project Althea, who loved to ſee any creature happy, rather encouraged. The child called her brother to help her; the garden pots were collected, filled with earth, and not without ſome labour carried into the houſe.—Their mother, however, objecting to this portable garden being placed in rooms where the purpoſes of her family œconomy were carrying on, the children propoſed to put them up in the banqueting-room, where they had ſometimes been permitted to play. This, after ſome

oppoſition

oppoſition from their father, they were allowed to do, and immediately proceeded to arrange their new green-houſe, aſſiſted by the maid;—while Althea, for whom the ſimpleſt pleaſure had charms, and who was not ſorry to take this opportunity of viſiting once more a place of which ſhe had ſometimes thought with fears that ſhe was now half aſhamed of, went up with them, and even directed their operations. She now again ſurveyed the room, which her imagination had lately filled with beings more terrific than ſpectres. It gave her no other idea than that of ſolitude and ruin. She obſerved that the cornices of this room, as well as the ivy that had crept into the hall beneath, would ſoon be peopled; for the ſparrow and the robin had already begun to build among them. From hence ſhe deſcended with her party, for ſhe was by no means courageous enough to go alone, to that part of the building where Mrs. Wansford

ford had ſhewn her the footſteps in the ſnow: but within there was no appearance that any perſon had been there; though Althea thought that this room, lighted by a window projecting from the thick wall (and where an old helmet, a halbert, a pair of gauntlets, and a ruſty pike over the great chimney, were the only movables that appeared), was the moſt defolate and gloomy part of the whole houſe. She was now ſatisfied, however, that all the fears ſhe had entertained in common with Mrs. Wansford were unfounded; and that the dog ſhe had ſeen was, as Wansford had aſſured her, a brown terrier which belonged to ſome of the neighbours, and which he had often ſeen about the buildings.

"He comes, I ſuppoſe," ſaid he, carelefsly, when Althea mentioned the circumſtance, "after the vermin, of which there is enough about this old place beſides rats, which make it impoſſible for

for me to keep any thing in any of theſe rooms, there are ſtoats or weaſels that breed about the holes in the battered walls. I ſaw one of them t'other day run acroſs the paſſage."

Althea remembering this, and finding not only the appearance of the animal ſhe had ſeen accounted for, but the noiſes alſo which alarmed the lurking ſuperſtition of Mrs. Wansford, no longer felt any reluctance to renew her walks in this great room. Here the good woman of the houſe, on Althea's report, agreed again to hang her clothes after a great waſh.

"It dries," ſays ſhe, "there, as well as if 'twas out upon the green; and then no wet can trouble us—ſo that it would be a thouſand pities to give up ſuch a convenient place."

From this period the gardening of the children, and the œconomy of their mother's bleaching operations, occaſioned the room to be frequently viſited.

Some days paſſed without any remarkable occurrence: Althea viſited her old friend Mrs. Moſely, and was ſurpriſed to find that no letter had been received from Mrs. Marchmont. In converſation with the ancient woman, Althea related the ſtrange circumſtance of Vampyre's inquiry at Eaſtwoodleigh. Mrs. Moſely anſwered coldly, that ſhe had heard of it; and immediately transferring the diſcourſe, from the oddneſs of the viſit, to the character of the man who had made it, ſhe ſaid, that he was accounted the greateſt rogue within three counties—"Aye, Miſs, and as I believe in all England—I hope it does not produce his fellow."

With the uſual garrulity of her age, Mrs. Moſely then began to tell ſeveral ſtories about him that had happened within her own knowledge; by which it appeared, that certain ruin followed wherever this diſgrace to his profeſſion and to human nature once infixed his

empoiſoned

empoiſoned fangs; and that his inſidious friendſhip was not leſs fatal to his employers, who were always his dupes, than was his enmity to thoſe againſt whom they engaged him.

"Many," ſaid ſhe, "aye, very many are the poor people whom he has undone—who have died in jail—and whoſe children have been turned out to beggary, or have gone to the pariſh. But, alas-a-day! nobody had more reaſon to know what a cruel villain he was than my late dear maſter; and ſure I am, that Sir Audley Dacres could never know what a hard thing he did when he put any matters againſt Mr. Marchmont into the management of this man. If it had not been for that, perhaps—but what is the uſe now of talking? What is to be, is to be; and what God pleaſes to direct is for the beſt."

Althea was too much hurt at the idea that her father had accelerated the ruin of Mr. Marchmont's family, to continue

the converſation. She bade her ſolitary friend a good evening, therefore, and walked penſively homeward, reflecting how ſtrange it was, that, in a country celebrated for its equal laws, a ſet of men ſhould exiſt, who, when they are diſhoneſt, contrive by means of the abuſe of thoſe laws to inflict more miſeries on individuals than can otherwiſe be produced in human life, ſave only thoſe which follow the abſurdity, madneſs, and wickedneſs of war.

CHAP.

CHAP. V.

One out of ſuits with fortune.

THOUGH ſpring now viſibly advanced, there were ſtill many diſagreeable and variable days before it was probable Althea could make thoſe excurſions into the country around, which promiſed her the only pleaſure it was likely to afford her.—The afternoons now grew long, but there was little temptation to walk—unleſs in the banqueting-room or gallery, taking a book with her. Thither ſhe was generally accompanied by the little Wansfords, whoſe cheerful voices as they ran about relieved (without diſturbing her

meditations) that mournful ſtillneſs which would otherwiſe have reigned in the deſerted rooms—ſtillneſs, unbroken but by the evening ſong of the robin, or, at a diſtance in the fields, the firſt low chant of the thruſh, which at this ſeaſon is heard almoſt ſingly to ſing his faint veſpers to the yet remote ſun.

It happened that Althea had one day received a letter from Linda Everſley, who, having very unexpectedly been carried to London by a relation, was intoxicated with the pleaſure and diſſipation into which, during her ſhort ſtay there, ſhe was permitted to enter; and ſhe wrote to Althea a long detail of all ſhe had ſeen, with a lively deſcription of the parties ſhe anticipated.

Far from feeling any thing like envy, Althea rejoiced in the ſatisfaction of her friend; yet, as ſhe traverſed the gallery, ſhe could hardly help ſome involuntary compariſons between *her* ſituation and that of moſt other young women. It

was

was true that it was her own choice; but ſhe could ſcarce refrain from thinking Sir Audley cruel, in having given her no other alternative than this dreary ſecluſion, or a marriage with a man ſhe deteſted. Her reflections were not cheerful; the afternoon was cold with a north-eaſt wind; and ſhe was on the point of returning to her parlour, when the eldeſt of Wansford's children, a girl between nine and ten years old, who had been hiding about in the empty rooms with her brother, came running on tiptoe to Althea, and, pale and trembling, whiſpered to her, that looking through a window in one of the cloſets which had a view into the end room, of that ſide where ſhe thought her brother was ſeeking for her, ſhe ſaw a man, who ſtood leaning near the chimney.—Althea, at once recollecting, or fancying, that this was the room of which ſo many ſtories were believed, turned as white as her little alarmiſt—"Surely, Nancy,"

ſaid ſhe, "ſurely you fancy this?—Where is your brother?—Perhaps you merely ſaw him, while he ſtaid to ſurpriſe you?"

"Oh, no; indeed," cried the child, "it is no fancy. I ſaw the man as plain as I ſee you, I am ſure I did.—Oh! let us go call ſomebody."

"I believe indeed," ſaid Althea, "we had better go—but, let us ſee for your brother firſt—he muſt not be left here."

"Oh! perhaps this man will kill him," cried the girl.—"Oh, dear Miſs, I am ſo afraid! Pray call my brother—pray let us go."

Confuſed and haraſſed by the wild expreſſions of fear which the child very naturally uttered, Althea knew not whether to go or ſtay. She was by no means weakly timid, yet her courage was unequal to the undertaking of verifying whether the apprehenſions of the terrified girl were well founded.—She now liſtened a moment in breathleſs ſilence; and

and then they heard the boy cry, Whoop!—as a ſignal to his ſiſter, that, wearied with looking for her, he was hid, and that it was her turn to find him.—Nancy now cried out, as loudly as her apprehenſions would let her, that ſhe could play no more, and that they were going.—The boy heard her, and came running down the oppoſite paſſage to that from which the cloſet opened where his ſiſter had been; and Althea, bidding them both go down ſtairs, was following them as faſt as her trembling knees would permit, when *ſhe* diſtinctly heard a door open—and then footſteps follow her towards the head of the ſtairs.—She haſtened on, not daring to look behind her—but was hardly got to the landing-place of the great ſtair-caſe (while the two children, for the girl had communicated her alarm to the other, ran ſwiftly through the hall) before ſhe heard a voice, which ſaid in a half whiſper—"Madam! Ma-

dam!—Miſs Dacres!—hear me but a moment—I beg of you not to be alarmed!"

Althea, holding by the baluſter, looked up. She ſaw, ſtanding on the top of the ſtairs, a figure, of which, as his back was to the light which came from the open door of the gallery, ſhe could not diſtinguiſh the face.—She was now alone in the houſe (for the children were already out of hearing); and in a ſtate of mind difficult to deſcribe, ſhe heſitated a moment whether ſhe ſhould ſtop to hear what this man had to ſay, or fly. It was evident that he knew her—his voice and manner were ſuch as ſeemed not to indicate any evil deſign. Rapidly theſe ideas paſſed through her mind—while the perſon, perceiving that ſhe wavered, approached her.—Althea ſtill deſcending the ſtairs, though with leſs ſpeed—he ſpoke to her again.—"Miſs Dacres," ſaid he, "will not ſurely refuſe to hear, for one

 moment,

moment, an unhappy man, whoſe life is, perhaps, in her power?"

She now ſaw his face, and became riveted to the place where ſhe ſtood; for through ſome change, which ſhe was in too much confuſion to conſider, ſhe recollected the features and voice of Marchmont.

The immediate terror for herſelf was now ſuſpended—ſurpriſe, and fear of ſome diſaſter to him—a thouſand ſenſations, which it was impoſſible to inveſtigate, prevented her ſpeaking; but as ſhe no longer teſtified any inclination to eſcape from him, Marchmont deſcended the reſt of the ſtairs, and, approaching her with the air of a man ſtill afraid of offending or alarming her, ſaid—"The children, whoſe alarm I heard, will probably bring ſome perſons hither before I can explain myſelf. My ſituation is as extraordinary as it is diſtreſſing; nor is it, Miſs Dacres, the leaſt painful of many ſad

reflections, that I have occaſioned to *you*, as I know I have, uneaſineſs and alarm. You will, however, I am ſure, do me the juſtice to believe, that I am not concealed thus like a robber, amidſt the ruins of my father's houſe, with any ill intentions—but through misfortunes that have driven me from ſociety."

He was proceeding, when voices were heard without the great entrance.—"I ſhall be diſcovered," cried he, "and the evils which for the ſake of others I have ſuffered ſo much to avoid muſt now come upon me!"

"For God's ſake, Sir," cried Althea, "do not hazard it—return, I implore you, to your concealment—I will endeavour to divert whatever enquiries may be made."

"You are all goodneſs," ſaid Marchmont.—"I have ſeen enough to convince me that your humanity, your excellent heart may be depended upon.

The

The higher my admiration of ſo much virtue ariſes, the more ardently I wiſh to vindicate myſelf from the ſuſpicions to which this ſtrange concealment may give occaſion. I believe it is in my power effectually to eſcape from any preſent purſuit, by ways known only to myſelf; but I cannot go till you condeſcend to promiſe me the honour of five minutes converſation once again. Tell me—may I hope for it, Madam?"

The voices became louder and nearer, calling Miſs Dacres!—Althea, hardly knowing what ſhe ſaid, and dreading to ſee this unhappy young man liable to the misfortunes that muſt follow his detection, anſwered, with a trembling voice, "That ſhe would be in the banqueting-room about the ſame hour the next day."

Marchmont, thanking her rather by a look than by words, inſtantly diſappeared; and Althea, who imagined, by the voices of the people of the houſe,

that

that they were afraid of entering the hall, croſſed it as ſwiftly as ſhe could, and near the door met Nancy, who with the maid, and a labourer they had called from the neighbouring barn, were waiting without the effect of repeating her name, for to enter the houſe was an undertaking they dared not venture upon. Her countenance was evidence enough, even to ſuch obſervers, of the terror ſhe had been in—but making an effort to aſſume compoſure, ſhe enquired what was the matter?

Hannah then explained, that, frightened out of her wits by the report of the children, who ſaid they had ſeen a man in the houſe who would certainly kill Miſs Dacres, ſhe had called Thomas from the barn, and they had come to ſee how they could help her.

Althea, who could not help thinking what ſuch aſſiſtance would have done for her had there really been danger, now attempted, as the only means to prevent

prevent a farther diſcovery, to perſuade the child to believe ſhe had been miſtaken.—"You are fanciful, Nancy," ſaid ſhe, "and muſt learn not to give way to ſuch filly fears. There was *no* man where you ſuppoſed. I went myſelf to ſee, and I am ſorry you have ſo needleſsly called any body."—She then walked quietly into the other wing of the houſe, obſerving that Thomas, who remained behind to faſten the great door, trembled as he did it, and haſtened after them as quick as poſſible, looking up to the windows with every mark of fear and conſternation. When he overtook Althea, he ſeemed to ſurvey her with marks of aſtoniſhment, as one who had more courage than belonged to her; and he whiſpered to Hannah, that, whatever Miſs might ſay, he was ſure little Nanny had ſeen ſomething.—"I know well enough," added he, "what my own mother have tould me, of ſtrange things

ſhe knewed—when ſhe lived ous-maid with the 'ſquire."

Althea, ſtill breathleſs, as well from the effects of fear as from her endeavours to hide her emotion, haſtened to her own apartment, and, ſhutting herſelf in, recalled, with increaſing aſtoniſhment, the circumſtances of a diſcovery ſo extraordinary.

It happened that neither Wansford nor his wife was at home; the former, having ſome buſineſs at the town about five miles off, had gone thither early in the day, and on account of his lameneſs was accompanied by his wife. They were now, however, every moment expected to return; and Althea had to conſider how ſhe was to act to conceal from them what ſhe doubted not their daughter's account would engage them to enquire into. Over the ſimple ſpirit of ſuch a child ſhe imagined it poſſible that ſhe might have influence enough,

to

to convince her ſhe was miſtaken; but as it was not likely the alarm the child had received, and communicated to others, ſhould not be known to her mother, Althea thought it would be difficult, if not impoſſible, long to evade her enquiries, or appeaſe thoſe fears to which the good woman was naturally prone.

Leaving this therefore to ſettle itſelf, Althea began to reflect on what Marchmont had requeſted of her, and on the extraordinary circumſtances of his concealment and appearance. There was now no doubt but that, in conſequence of thoſe debts ſo unhappily though ſo piouſly incurred, Marchmont was reduced to the ſad neceſſity of ſeeking this dreary aſylum againſt his mercileſs creditors; and it was equally certain that it was of him, Vampyre and his myrmidons were in purſuit. A thouſand fears for his final ſafety now mingled themſelves with deteſtation of that ruffian who moleſted him, and pity

for

for the forlorn condition to which he was reduced. Sometimes ſhe doubted the propriety of her keeping the haſty appointment ſhe had made—yet her generous ſenſibility would not allow her to evade it: ſhe conſidered, that Marchmont would hardly have aſked it if he had not believed ſhe could render him ſome friendly ſervice, and ſhe remembered how anxiouſly ſhe had wiſhed for means and opportunity of relieving his unhappy family. As to the latent partiality ſhe had felt for him, ſhe had yet hardly truſted herſelf to aſk what it meant; or, rather, ſhe imputed entirely to pity for his unmerited misfortunes, that complacency with which ſhe had accuſtomed herſelf to think of him ſince their accidental interview at Capelſtoke.

She determined then to keep her promiſe, which ſhe thought it could not be improper to do. It was impoſſible Marchmont could have any evil deſign; and whatever might be the imprudence

of

of meeting thus a perſon almoſt a ſtranger to her, ſhe had no ſatirical remarks from others to fear, and her own heart told her, that ſhe meant only to obey the dictates of humanity and benevolence. It was true, that young women of her age are not, according to the eſtabliſhed rules, to truſt themſelves with perſons who may preſume upon their condeſcenſion:—but Althea conſidered herſelf as placed in a ſingular ſituation, where mere forms might be diſpenſed with; and ſhe looked on Marchmont as a young man who could not have any other claims to attention from her, than thoſe which every human creature in diſtreſs has on his fellow being.

Having calmed her mind, and taken her reſolution, ſhe awaited the return of her hoſt and hoſteſs; who no ſooner arrived at home, than their little girl began to tell her mother the terror ſhe had been in—and to relate alſo, that

Miſs

Miſs Dacres ſeemed ſadly frightened at firſt, but afterwards went herſelf to look, and ſaid it was nothing—no, nothing in the world but her fancy!

Wansford, who had invariably diſcouraged ſuch fears, and who had come home fatigued and out of humour, ſcolded firſt at the girl, and then at the mother, who had, he ſaid, put ſuch a parcel of nonſenſe in the poor child's head, that ſhe would grow up fit for nothing at all, and never be qualified to earn her bread in the world. He then ſternly bade her be ſilent; and his wife, as well as his children, knowing the neceſſity of obedience, the ſtory ſeemed likely to be ſtifled for the preſent; but before Mrs. Wansford went to bed, ſhe could not help gliding into Althea's room, to hear what ſhe ſaid to Nancy's ſtory. After ſhe had related what the child had told her, with many exaggerations, Althea quietly anſwered, that it was very true ſhe had been at firſt

alarmed

alarmed at the little girl's report; "for I fancied," ſaid ſhe, "that thoſe horrid men, who were here the other day, might have got into the houſe; but, on going to the place, I was convinced there was nobody—I am perſuaded ſhe ſaw only her brother.—It was duſk, and ſome of the ſtories ſhe had heard were in Nancy's head. You had better not encourage her in any of theſe fears: in this inſtance, I aſſure you, they are groundleſs, for I examined into the foundation of her apprehenſions myſelf."

Mrs. Wansford ſhuddered at this exertion of courage, and left her—far from being convinced that Nanny had been miſtaken.

CHAP.

CHAP. VI.

Io sol, fra viventi
L' asilo, non ho!

AS the hour approached on which Althea had promised to meet Marchmont, she became so apprehensive and uneasy, that she could not for a moment remain in the same place, but traversed the inhabited rooms with such visible inquietude, that, had not Mrs. Wansford been at that time busied more than usual, she must have observed it. At any other period some contrivance would have been necessary to shake off the attendance of the children, who were accustomed to follow her when she

ſhe went for her evening walks in the garden or gallery; but now the impreſſion of fear was ſo recent on their minds, that, inſtead of importuning her for permiſſion to accompany her, they kept cloſe to their mother, and Althea, with a beating heart, walked ſlowly and unobſerved towards the great door of the old hall, which was, ſhe believed, the only entrance to the deſerted buildings. On reaching it, however, ſhe ſtopped; recollecting, at that moment, that ſhe neither knew how to open the door, nor probably had ſtrength to do it. She heſitated; but not long, for footſteps were heard within, and the door was opened by Marchmont.

Althea ſtepped haſtily in, but ſhe could not ſpeak. Marchmont cloſed after her the great heavy door, and the noiſe of its ſhutting re-echoed through the vacant rooms.

Amidſt the deep dejection that viſibly hung over him, a gleam of pleaſure lightened

lightened in the eyes of Marchmont; yet hardly did he venture to expreſs what he felt, before it ſeemed loſt in ſad reflections on his condition, and how different a reception he was giving to Miſs Dacres from what he might have done under other circumſtances. He was in the place where his anceſtors had dwelt in affluence and in honour; but *he* was himſelf a wretched wanderer, concealed like a culprit; receiving a viſit of charity and compaſſion from a young woman, in whom, as he plainly ſaw by her countenance and manner, commiſeration was not unmingled with terror. Senſations ſo full of pain and mortification he endeavoured to ſubdue; and in a manner the moſt reſpectful, though his voice trembled as he ſpoke, he thanked her for her goodneſs and condeſcenſion.—"In this wretched ſcene of deſolation," ſaid he, "*where* can I aſk Miſs Dacres to honour me with her attention?"

Althea,

Althea, who perceived how much he was affected, anſwered, with a faint attempt to look cheerful, that place was altogether immaterial: adding—"If you, Sir, have, as I ſuſpect, reſided here ſome time in the preſent condition of the houſe, it cannot ſurely be any great hardſhip for *me* to remain, at leaſt as long as may ſuffice for me to hear how I can be fortunate enough to do you any ſervice."

"I will not," replied Marchmont, as he led the way up to the great room where Althea uſually walked—"I will not attempt, Madam, to expreſs how deeply I am ſenſible of your goodneſs and condeſcenſion. The firſt moment I ſaw you, I believed all I have ſince found to be true of your character.—Your charity to the poor old ſervant who has ſhared the calamities of my family, made the deepeſt impreſſion on my mind. With her I found a temporary aſylum; and from her I heard, that

Miſs Dacres had even the humanity to intereſt herſelf for my mother, for my ſiſters; who, in common with myſelf, have no other recommendation to her than what we have acquired by misfortune!—Do not, however, imagine that my knowledge of this your tenderneſs of diſpoſition has engaged me to intrude upon it. I know your ſituation: I honour, I reverence the noble principles on which you have preferred a reſidence in this now dreary and ſequeſtered ſpot, to the higheſt affluence and proſperity. Long, long may that courage, ſo conſiſtent with female tenderneſs and female dignity, ſupport you in your honourable reſiſtance!"

The vehemence with which this ſentence was ſpoken, rendered it very unlike what would have been uttered by the calm voice of diſintereſted friendſhip. Marchmont ſeemed himſelf conſcious of it, and, as if he had been betrayed into an indiſcretion, pauſed

to

to recover himſelf.—Althea had nothing to reply—and, after a moment's ſilence, he proceeded in a lower tone:

"Too well aſſured, notwithſtanding *that* rectitude of mind which will ſupport its poſſeſſor under almoſt every inconvenience, that you could not fail, Madam, to have uneaſineſs enough, amid deprivations ſuch as you muſt endure here, and ſuffering perhaps from Sir Audley's diſpleaſure—I ſhould never, no, believe me, I ſhould never have preſumed to attempt relating to you a detail of afflictions, (I believe I may ſay) unmerited afflictions, of which, ſince they cannot be relieved, it muſt diſtreſs a mind like yours to hear! But I find that my removal from this wretched aſylum is, from ſome late circumſtances, become neceſſary. I know not what will be my final deſtiny; but as long, very long impriſonment it will be hardly poſſible for me to avoid, as I may never again enjoy the honour of ſpeaking to

you, I could not determine to throw myself upon my fate, without attempting to appease those alarms which my enforced concealment, added to the legends which always belong to such houses as this, have very naturally contributed to give, even to a mind guarded, as I am sure yours, Madam, is, by reason and reflection. I cannot render this forsaken place worthy of one who would be the loveliest ornament of a palace; but, by explaining what I know must have given you occasional inquietude, I may at least prevent those apprehensions which must lend additional gloom to these forlorn scenes. May I also without presumption add, that, amid the misfortunes which I go to meet, I shall feel a great satisfaction in knowing that my conduct, which I know has been, and will be still more misrepresented, is at least explained to one on whose good opinion I set infinite value? and that, perhaps, while I

am

am condemned by many, unpitied by others, and neglected by all, Miſs Dacres will not think that misfortune is guilt, and will remember me with ſome concern."—His heart ſeemed now almoſt too full for utterance; but he recovered himſelf inſtantly, and went on: "It is not to many people I would *appeal* for their pity—it is not from many people I would *accept* it. But *yours*, Miſs Dacres, will be moſt ſoothing to a heart which is even at this early period of life outraged by a cruel world. And alas, Madam! driven as I am from my family, not allowed even to afford them the protection they want; an exile from ſociety, and compelled either to live as a wretched vagabond, or ſubmit to ſee my whole life waſted within the walls of a priſon—it is long ſince I have dared to ſeek the ſad conſolation of relating my ſorrows; long ſince I have heard one friendly ſentence, unleſs from that helpleſs ſolitary old ſervant

whoſe wants you have with ſo much humanity ſupplied. I believe you are acquainted with ſome of thoſe circumſtances which have reduced my family, from affluence as great as is often enjoyed by private gentlemen, to the ſtate we are now in. Since the death of my poor father I have lived in a continual ſtruggle with adverſity. It will, it muſt at length overwhelm me. But if I could have ſaved my mother, my ſiſters, amidſt the wreck, I ſhould not have devoted myſelf in vain! Believe me, Miſs Dacres, no intereſt leſs dear than theirs, ſhould have compelled me to ſubmit to the diſgrace of thus ignominiouſly ſkulking from the purſuit of the harpies, who have a legal right to take from me—almoſt all I poſſeſs—the privilege of breathing the air, and ſeeing the light of Heaven. But I have been flattered by hopes; I have been lured into this degrading concealment by the expectation that a little time might appeaſe the malignity of my purſuers;

purſuers; that they would be prevailed upon, by the interpoſition of Mr. Everſley (the only friend who has, as far as was in his power, adhered to me), to give me time to try what I can do for their ſatisfaction by my induſtry. To await the event of his attempts I ſubmitted to hide myſelf, though he was not himſelf acquainted with, or even ſuſpected, the place of my retreat. But my poor mother, who alone was privy to it, has very lately acquainted me that the two creditors who purſue me with ſo much rancour are now more inveterate than ever. And indeed I knew I had little to expect from their mercy, when I found that, while they appeared to liſten to the mediation of Mr. Everſley, they let looſe upon me that *fiend*, who, in the ſhape of an attorney, embittered the laſt ſad moments of my father; and, before his poor remains were conveyed to their place of reſt, had taken meaſures to turn into the world unſhel-

tered and pennyleſs his widow and his children——that *miſcreant* (for it debaſes the ſpecies to call him man), who adviſed them to ſtop the cold aſhes of my parent in their way to interment; and to accept no terms but thoſe of my binding myſelf for the debt, which he believed my friends would pay rather than that I ſhould be hurried to priſon."

"And this wretch," ſaid Althea, taking advantage of a ſhort pauſe, "this Vampyre was, I fear, *firſt* empowered to purſue and oppreſs you by my father, by Sir Audley Dacres?"

"Not exactly ſo," replied Marchmont. "The villain was one of many of thoſe agents whom the father of the preſent Lady Dacres was uſed to employ in his money tranſactions, one of which you know put his heireſs, and in her right Sir Audley, into poſſeſſion of this houſe and eſtate. I do not blame Sir Audley himſelf, becauſe, had he from any motives of generoſity been diſpoſed

to

to remove the affairs that concerned us from the harpy talons of this venomous reptile, he might not have had it in his power; for never yet was the wretch known to relinquiſh an employment, while he could by chicane and fraud extort a guinea from his employer. And indeed, had it been otherwiſe, I had no claim on the forbearance of Sir Audley Dacres. He never gave me encouragement to hope for his favour; he ſaw me unfortunate, and it requires more time than he probably had to ſpare to diſtinguiſh *imprudence* from *misfortune*. There *are*, to whom poverty always wears the ſemblance of blame."

Althea ſighed deeply, but did not interrupt him.

"I do not however mean to ſay," continued Marchmont, "that Sir Audley is of that diſpoſition. His being ſo nearly related to Miſs Dacres would for ever make him reſpectable in my eyes.

But pardon me, I wander from my ſubject——

"Vampyre, this attorney, was empowered to arreſt me; and he muſt, I believe, have employed under ſome falſe pretence, and engaged by the promiſe of conſiderable reward, the myrmidons of the police, or he could never have traced me as he did to the cottage of Mrs. Moſely; where I had hardly been concealed a week, before I found it was beſieged by that unfeeling ſpecies of the ſatellites of law who live on the miſeries of the unhappy debtor. I had no counſel but a ſick and feeble old woman, who, when ſhe found that to be ſafe in her little hovel was impoſſible, adviſed me to have recourſe to the parts of this houſe which had been contrived to conceal fugitives of a very different deſcription. I knew them well, and was, perhaps, the only perſon who *did* know them. Ah! how little I ever thought, in the happy days of my childhood and early

early youth, that I ſhould ever linger about the paſſages which I had frequently explored with a ſort of melancholy curioſity, as the aſylum of the ruined Cavaliers, and even the unhappy exiles of royal blood, whoſe hiſtory I have often conſidered with pain, mingled with a degree of that hereditary pride which my father had perhaps too much pleaſure in encouraging; while I reflected on the ſhare *my* family had in ſcenes which I do not now ſee quite in the ſame light as I was then taught to behold them!

"I dared not then, Madam, I dared not implore *your* aſſiſtance, though from your humanity towards poor Moſely I believed I ſhould have found it; but to ſecure the coincidence of Mr. Wansford was abſolutely neceſſary. He had the character of an honeſt man—I knew he had been a faithful ſervant in your family during the life of your mother. Something was to be hazarded; and I was ſo beſet by the followers of Vam-

pyre, that no other eſcape appeared practicable. I ventured then to entruſt to Wansford the truth of my ſituation. The man heard it with that diſpoſition which belongs to an unadulterated Engliſh ſpirit. He deteſted the malignant tyranny of the two rich men, who without any poſſible advantage to themſelves purſued me merely to gratify the rage of diſappointed avarice. He had himſelf ſuffered from ſome of the lower retainers of the law. He knew enough of Vampyre's character to hold him in that ſort of abhorrence which an honeſt mind feels towards cunning and cruelty; and he ſaw no prejudice that could happen to himſelf from affording me the aſylum I aſked, which was merely permiſſion to bring a mattreſs and bed-clothes into one of thoſe ſmall receſſes (for they can hardly be called rooms), which have been contrived amid the thick walls of this old building. There are three of them, wide of each other, but communicating

nicating by paſſages ſo narrow as to admit but one perſon at a time, and in ſome places by ſteps ſo ſteep that only an active man could paſs them. Into the leaſt damp of theſe I contrived, by the aſſiſtance, or rather the connivance, of Wansford, to convey ſome ſtraw, a mattreſs, and ſuch other neceſſaries as might ſecure from the effects of great cold and humidity a man brought up to a more delicate manner of life than he has lately been accuſtomed to. Adverſity is an excellent and radical cure for the errors that fond parents often commit in the education of an only ſon.

"By the ſame means the faithful ſervant who was brought up with me from a boy, and on whom I cannot prevail to ſeek another maſter, conveyed to me requiſite food. He equipped himſelf in a round frock, cut off his hair, and exchanged his uſual clothes for the coarſeſt of thoſe worn by the peaſants; and thus changed

changed in appearance, he paſſed for the nephew of Mrs. Moſely, and took a lodging in the next village, from whence he uſed to creep of a night with ſuch food as he could purchaſe without ſuſpicion, going, or rather pretending to go, during the day, to his labour in a diſtant pariſh.

"It is now a month ſince I embraced this manner of life, rather in compliance with the wiſhes of my mother than becauſe I preferred it myſelf to the impriſonment that awaits me. But the viſit that about ten days ſince that blood-hound Vampyre paid to my humane protector Wansford, left hardly any doubt but that I had been traced hither: and though the reſolute refuſal of Wansford to admit thoſe wretches to ſearch the houſe has made their ſucceſs rather more remote and difficult; yet, having once got ſcent of me, I know it cannot be long before I muſt either quit my concealment, or be taken in it."

Althea

Althea now, in a tremulous voice that marked how much ſhe was affected, enquired whether, ſince the private paſſages and retreats in the houſe were ſo ſecure from the viſits of thoſe who were not acquainted with them, he might not ſtill remain undiſcovered?

Marchmont replied, "I poſſibly might, though the exiſtence of ſuch hiding-places is too well known to make them very ſecure againſt a ſtrict ſearch; but I fear," added he, with a faint attempt at cheerfulneſs, "that the ſiege would inevitably be turned to a blockade, and that the garriſon would be ſtarved into a ſurrender; for my poor purveyor, Fenchurch, has lately been alarmed with an account, that as he is a ſtranger he is believed to be a deſerter from Plymouth; and that a man who is employed in the impreſs ſervice at a village on the ſea-coaſt has declared it ſhall ſoon be ſeen *what* he is. This muſt be a manœuvre of Vampyre's. The poor fellow, though there

there is no difficulty or danger that he would not encounter in my ſervice, is terrified at the idea of being forced away, and detained on board ſhip—while my ſupplies failing in his abſence, I muſt quit my concealment, and yield without farther reſiſtance to my purſuers."

Althea heard with increaſing concern this threatened accumulation of calamity. Marchmont continued to ſpeak.

"Already, perhaps, my unfortunate companion in adverſe fortune may have fallen into the ſnare; for ſince the evening before yeſterday he has not appeared."

"Good God!" exclaimed Althea, "you have been, and are then, perhaps, without neceſſary ſuſtenance?"

"Not altogether ſo—I never was ſo improvident as to be wholly without; for I foreſaw that many accidents might happen to impede punctual ſupplies. I have not, it is true, fared very ſumptuouſly: but why ſhould not I, who am reduced

reduced to a condition even below that of the peaſant who labours for his daily bread, but who is free and independent—why ſhould not I learn to live as ſcantily as he does?"

Though he ſaid this in a cheerful voice, Althea, looking at him as he ſpoke, could hardly refrain from tears.

"Will you allow me," ſaid ſhe, "to ſend you (unleſs I may invite you to ſhare it in my parlour) a part of my ſupper? I beg your pardon for uſing the word *ſend*—I would not for the world hazard any thing of that ſort—but will you ſuffer me to *bring* you ſome kind of food, better than I fear you can now have? Conſider me, Sir, as one of your ſiſters, and believe that neither of them could be more rejoiced than I ſhall be to contribute ſuch relief as can now be found in a ſituation ſo painful, and which you ſo little merit."

While ſhe ſpoke thus, Marchmont gazed at her with an expreſſion in his countenance,

countenance, to which words can do but little juſtice.

"It ſeems," ſaid he in a low voice, "it ſeems as if the heavieſt evils of life are mitigated and ſoftened—perhaps that they may be the longer endured. Your generous compaſſion, Madam, would be a panacea for greater evils than *I* endure: but, when it becomes painful to you, as I think I plainly perceive it is, I dare not aſk its continuance. I ought rather to withdraw myſelf, and to intrude upon you no more. . . . ."

As if unable to go on, he now pauſed—while Althea, who fancied ſhe heard footſteps below, and trembled leſt he ſhould be ſurpriſed, beſought him eagerly not to think of any thing but his own ſafety.

"If," ſaid ſhe, "your ſervant ſhould have been taken, as his long abſence makes but too probable, may it not lead to a diſcovery?—At the very idea of the wretch whom I ſaw the other day, my

my ſoul recoils. Every thing is ſurely to be endured rather than that you ſhould be in his power. Tell me, Sir, I beg of you, what you propoſe?—what I can do for you?"

The voice of Althea betrayed her agitation, and Marchmont recovered himſelf.

"I am aſhamed," ſaid he, "of my weakneſs; and ſhocked that I have thus diſturbed you. You aſk me, moſt amiable Miſs Dacres, what is my deſign? Alas! I would aſk counſel of you; for in truth I know not how to act. For my mother's ſake, whoſe heart will be quite broken by my impriſonment, I would avoid it—but, alas! how?—If Fenchurch is taken, as I very much fear, I cannot remain here—and even if he has been detained only by ſome accident, I believe my concealment is now too much ſuſpected long to avail me. I would quit it, therefore, in the night, and, making my way to the neareſt ſea-port,

endeavour

endeavour to eſcape from the inhuman purſuit of men, with whom my ſurrender can gratify no paſſion but vengeance.—Yet even to this there are objections. . . . Indeed I know not how I could leave England but as a ſoldier or a ſailor; and to my becoming either one or the other, it ſeems as if my mother had almoſt as ſtrong objections as againſt my incurring the horrors of perpetual confinement."

Althea too well underſtood, however he evaded naming, the reaſons that prevented his quitting England otherwiſe than in ſome military capacity—that he had neither means of paying for his paſſage, nor his ſupport, whitherſoever he might be driven.

She now ran over in her mind, though in a hurried way, the poſſibility of her aſſiſting him in this cruel exigence—but again fancying ſhe heard perſons walking beneath the windows of the room, and ſeeing it was already evening, and that it would be impoſſible for him to determine

mine on any plan that night, ſhe became ſolicitous for his preſent ſecurity, and that he might not be longer a ſufferer, from the abſence of his ſervant, as to the actual neceſſaries of life. Collecting, therefore, all her courage, ſhe ſaid,

"Allow me, Sir, to propoſe to you to return for this night to your ſad cell—to-morrow morning I will do myſelf the pleaſure of ſeeing you again, if you will permit me; and in the mean time pray tell me, if you can deviſe any ſafe way by which neceſſary food may immediately be conveyed to you?"

"How very good you are," ſaid Marchmont, "to be my purveyor! and how little do I deſerve ſuch kindneſs from you, to whom I know I have long been a ſource of fear, and am now likely to be the cauſe of trouble! Be not alarmed," added he, ſeeing by her countenance that ſhe apprehended ſome intruſion, "I believe I am pretty ſecure for this evening; and ſince your long abſence

ſence may perhaps raiſe ſome uneaſineſs in the good woman of the houſe (from whom, for what reaſon I know not, her huſband ſeems very anxious to keep the ſecret of my concealment), I will moſt thankfully accept your generous propoſal of half an hour's converſation to-morrow morning: and now, if you have courage to truſt yourſelf with me, I will ſhew you a way by which, without going through the hall, or any of the viſible paſſages, this part of the houſe has a communication with that you inhabit. Althea profeſſing her readineſs to follow him, ſince ſhe thought it leſs hazardous for him than her being let out at the hall door, he removed the damaged picture, which, as has been mentioned, reſted againſt the wainſcot in the banqueting-room; and, puſhing aſide a pannel of the lower part of it, a dark and narrow paſſage appeared, juſt capable of admitting one perſon at a time. Marchmont deſcended into it by two deep ſteps; and

Althea,

Althea, not without ſome dread, which, however, ſhe was aſhamed of, followed him.

He led her along an avenue, equally dark and narrow, into a room which was not among thoſe ſhe had been ſhewn by Mrs. Moſely, but more gloomy than any of them, and the evening was now cloſing in. Marchmont felt her hand tremble as he held it, and ſaid—

"How much I am obliged to you for your noble confidence! I fear this way is very unpleaſant to you; but, however, it is very ſhort."

So ſaying, he opened the door of what appeared to be a large old wainſcot preſs; and urging with ſome force his foot againſt the ſide, it gave way, and delivered them into another obſcure but ſhort paſſage, and from thence into the room where Wansford kept his ſmall ſtores, ſuch as malt, winter roots, and wheat, which he had by various contrivances

trivances ſecured from the vermin that the houſe was infeſted with.

"You ſee," cried Marchmont, "that I am not ſo deſtitute of the power of procuring proviſions as you imagined; and that here, like a true prodigal, I might feed on huſks and on roots."

Althea could not anſwer his pleaſantry, ſo deeply was ſhe affected by his ſituation; but ſhe eagerly enquired whether, by this avenue, Wansford could not convey him food?

"I have never yet propoſed it," anſwered he, "becauſe I have never yet been quite deſtitute; and I knew it was hardly poſſible for him conſtantly to ſupply me, without betraying to his wife a ſecret which he ſeemed to dread her knowing."

"But to-night," ſaid Althea, "may I leave here what you have undoubtedly occaſion for?"

"I certainly ſhall not die of repletion," anſwered he, "if I do not receive

ceive your bounty; for my fare has been to-day and yeſterday rather harder than uſual: but if I go ſupperleſs to bed, fate will not deal worſe with me than ſhe does continually with thoſe who have toiled all day."

Althea however, finding that ſhe could thus ſupply him, inſiſted upon his remaining concealed near the room till ſhe could return, and then with a palpitating heart haſtened to her own bedchamber; where taking off her hat and cloak, ſhe affected to go down to her parlour, as if juſt returned from walking, and, ringing the bell, ordered her ſupper.

Mrs. Wansford, who immediately attended, expreſſed ſome wonder at her ſtaying out ſo late, and ſtill more that ſhe had not heard her come in. Althea gave ſlight anſwers to her queſtions; and ſaying that ſhe had been for a long walk, which had given her an unuſual appetite, Mrs. Wansford beſtirred herſelf to pro-

duce ſuch cold proviſions as ſhe had. Althea having concealed as much of them as ſhe could, ſent the reſt away, and under pretence of fatigue haſtened to her room. Then, after a moment's pauſe, with light but faltering ſteps, ſhe hurried towards that where Marchmont waited for her; for, knowing that Mrs. Wansford's fears prevented her ever viſiting this room, he had not concealed himſelf. He would have thanked his trembling benefactreſs; but ſhe entreated him, in a whiſper, not to ſpeak, and glided as ſwiftly as poſſible away; fearing leſt her hoſteſs, whoſe bed-room was at the oppoſite end of the paſſage, ſhould diſcover her before ſhe could make good her retreat.

CHAP.

CHAP. VII.

Povera affetti miei!
Se non ſanno impetrar dal tuo bel core
Pieta, ſe non amore!

ALONE in her own room, Althea collected her confuſed and diſſipated thoughts. The firſt ſurpriſe ſhe had felt now gave way to the pity, reſpect, and apprehenſion for his ſafety, with which the manner and the narrative of Marchmont had inſpired her, mingled with a ſenſe of the impropriety of her own ſituation; of which ſhe would probably have been leſs painfully ſenſible, had ſhe not been conſcious that there was ſomething more than compaſſion in

the extreme concern ſhe felt for Marchmont.

Beſides the too great probability there was, that the fiend who hung with ſuch unappeaſable rancour on the purſuit would ſoon force him from his concealment, Althea dreaded leſt even from that remote ſpot the whiſper of malignity might reach her father and Lady Dacres; and ſhould that happen, it might be of the utmoſt prejudice to Marchmont, and create in regard to herſelf ſuſpicions and opinions which it might never afterwards be in her power to obliterate.

A young man of Marchmont's deſcription concealed for a long ſpace of time in a houſe of which ſhe was the oſtenſible inhabitant, muſt give riſe to much ſcandal were it known; and ſince it was ſuſpected by Vampyre, it was but too probable that he would aſſert it, and convey the aſſertion ſomehow or other to Sir Audley (to whom indeed he was known),

known), in the hope that by the means of his interference Marchmont might be driven from his aſylum, and, by the diſpleaſure his ſeeking it might create, raiſe another powerful and vindictive enemy in the perſon of Sir Audley Dacres.

Tormented and perplexed by theſe thoughts, Althea could not determine what advice ſhe ſhould give to the unfortunate fugitive. It ſeemed beſt to propoſe his quitting England—yet where could he obtain money, and whither ſhould he go?—The latter queſtion it was, perhaps, eaſier to anſwer, even in the preſent confuſed ſtate of affairs on the continent, than it was to ſay, where he ſhould find the means of conveying himſelf thither—ſince, though he did not confeſs it, ſhe was convinced by his manner that his pecuniary exigences were ſuch as made his attempting ſuch a journey impoſſible.

With that timid deference to the opinion of the world, which is an amiable feature in the character of a young woman, Althea had alſo that ſtrength of mind that enabled her to be decided when her underſtanding and conſcience told her ſhe was right. In conſidering, therefore, how far ſhe could in this way aſſiſt him, ſhe put aſide every other reflection but that of the pleaſure it would give her to reſcue a fellow-creature from ſo cruel a fate as that which hung over Marchmont. For any deſerving perſon ſhe felt that ſhe would have made the ſame exertion: yet ſhe did not deny even to herſelf, that the perſonal merit of Marchmont, the promiſe of proſperous fortune ſo cruelly diſappointed, his filial piety, and the fair expectations of his youth unhappily blaſted, contributed to produce in his favour a more lively intereſt than ſhe would have been ſenſible of for almoſt any other being.

On

On examining her ſtock of money, which ſince her reſidence at Eaſt Woodleigh ſhe had but little diminiſhed, ſhe found it conſiſted of twelve guineas, and two Bank notes of twenty pounds each (the remains of fifty pounds, which ſhe had been paid out of Mrs. Trevyllian's property), and twenty-five which Sir Audley had given her for the expences of her journey: ſince which he had never ſent her any ſupply, ſuppoſing (if he thought about it at all) that at Eaſtwoodleigh ſhe could have no occaſion for money; and it was true that, except her little charities, ſhe had neither wiſh nor opportunities of indulging in any expence.

Of the ſum then in her poſſeſſion Althea could well ſpare five-and-forty guineas, which ſhe thought might, with ſome ſmall ſum he probably poſſeſſed himſelf, be ſufficient to ſecure the retreat of Marchmont to Holland or France. But ſhe foreſaw, that to offer it to him

would be a matter of extreme delicacy. She doubted whether any thing could engage him to accept it; and ſhe foreſaw that, if he did not, the ſuppoſition that remaining where he was, was diſagreeable to her, would haſten his quitting Eaſtwoodleigh at whatever hazard; —an apprehenſion which acquired new force, as ſhe recollected ſome of thoſe broken ſentences which, half uttering, he ſeemed ſuddenly to repreſs. They were indeed the effect of that undeſcribable variety of ſenſations which paſſed through his mind. He knew that, as far as related to Althea, his ſituation under the ſame roof was altogether improper; and to hazard any injury to her, no conſideration that had for its object only his perſonal ſafety could have engaged him. Yet having once yielded to the pleaſure of ſeeing her, and now of converſing with her; hearing her voice, and reading in her intelligent eyes that ſhe was even more intereſted for him

than

than ſhe wiſhed to avow, he had not courage to tear himſelf away, though conſcious that to ſtay at all was improper—to ſtay long impoſſible.

While this conteſt continued in the breaſt of Marchmont, Althea was on her part ſtudying how ſhe might induce him to accept what ſhe was ſure he muſt greatly want; and no other means occurred to her, but to contrive that Wansford ſhould convey it to him without his knowing from whence it came. This, however, was an expedient which ſhe could not think of adopting without reluctance; and ſo many were the objections to it which aroſe, that at length ſhe determined to poſtpone any arrangement of this matter till ſhe had again ſeen and converſed with Marchmont.

She haſtened, therefore, to this conference with every precaution that was neceſſary to miſlead the curioſity of Mrs. Wansford, who believed her going to make one of her charitable viſits at the

cottage. Marchmont was impatiently expecting her; and she was let into the hall unperceived by any of those whose observation she desired to avoid.

The comfortless state in which he had now so long remained, and anxiety which every hour increased, had occasioned, even since Althea parted with him the preceding night, a great alteration in the appearance of the unfortunate young man.—His eyes were hollow and sunk, his face pale, and Althea thought he seemed personally to suffer, though he did not complain. He addressed her with a melancholy solemnity, thanked her for this additional proof of her goodness of heart, and then said—

"It is not fit, Miss Dacres, that so unfortunate a being as I am should trespass thus on that goodness. Since I had the honour of seeing you last, I have thoroughly considered my situation; and I have determined to submit to the ignominy of it no longer.—If such are the

laws

laws of my country, that from even an unoffending debtor as I am, nothing will ſatisfy thoſe laws but that I ſhould terminate my life in priſon, there will be leſs diſgrace ſurely in yielding to my deſtiny, than there is in the miſery of thus ſhifting from place to place—a burden to the few who have humanity to be intereſted for me—a burden to myſelf.

"My mother, my dear unhappy mother! will ſubmit with fortitude when ſhe knows the worſt, and knows it to be unavoidable. To inevitable evils they ſay that the human mind moſt eaſily accommodates itſelf; and when I am confined ſhe will learn, that our reſiſtance is vain, and that our projects are at an end. She will be wretched, I know, but uncertainty and ſolicitude will be no more. I ſhall yet exiſt—I may ſee her and my poor ſiſters. Perhaps I may find means to ſubſiſt in confinement, as hundreds of others are known to ſubſiſt; and one chance will yet remain, towards which

my family may look with hope. At ſome period or other, if humanity ſhould touch the hearts of thoſe who have the power, at the inſtance of that generous * man who is the pride and honour of his country, an act of inſolvency may releaſe me—releaſe me," added he with a deep-drawn ſigh, "to the privilege of being a beggar in the world at large!"

Althea heard him with the deepeſt concern, yet was by no means prepared to controvert his reaſoning. After a moment's ſilence, however, ſhe ventured timidly to enquire whether nothing could be thought of to avoid ſo painful, ſo ſad an experiment, as that of putting himſelf into the hands of theſe pitileſs men, to anſwer no poſſible purpoſe.

"Surely," ſaid ſhe, "your friend Mr. Everſley might and would aſſiſt you." For at that moment it occurred to Althea, that by his means ſhe could con-

* It is hardly neceſſary to name Lord Moira.

vey

vey to Marchmont the pecuniary help ſhe wiſhed to engage him to accept.

"Everſley!" repeated Marchmont, with quickneſs—"No—that cannot be. Everſley is an excellent man. I owe him a thouſand obligations, but they have coſt him too dear. I know how much uneaſineſs I have been the occaſion of, and nothing on earth ſhould induce me to repeat it—Beſides, there are other reaſons . . . . . My friend is affluent indeed, but I do not envy him: Poor fellow! he is rather an object of pity. Deſtitute as I am, the fate of Everſley excites my compaſſion. He does not know, for I had many reaſons for my concealment, where I now am."

Althea was on the point of betraying herſelf, by ſaying that ſhe heard he was in Ireland from Linda Everſley. But recollecting herſelf, ſhe continued ſilent. Marchmont renewed the converſation.

verſation. He even forced a languid ſmile as he ſaid—

"And ſuppoſe that the inveterate malignity of theſe men, who, like Shylock, inſiſt upon their bond, which they know I cannot pay—ſuppoſe it urges them to the greateſt extremities? I am of a race, of which many members have been impriſoned, though not indeed for quite the ſame cauſe. You recollect, perhaps, a beautiful little piece of poetry *, written by

* In Wood's Athenæ, page 228, Vol. II. may be ſeen at large the affecting ſtory of this elegant writer, who, having been diſtinguiſhed for every gallant and polite accompliſhment, the pattern of his own ſex, and the darling of the ladies, died in the loweſt obſcurity, wretchedneſs, and want, in 1658.—Part of the Song follows:

"When Love with unconfined wings
Hovers within my gates,
And my divine Althea brings
To whiſper at my grates:

When

by a Colonel Richard Lovelace, who was impriſoned in the Gate-houſe at Weſtminſter for adherence to his unhappy maſter. He was the brother of my father's grandmother. He died in great obſcurity, and poverty. My fate and his may probably in many inſtances be alike."

Althea inſtantly recollected the lines, and the name of Althea, by which the unfortunate Lovelace celebrates his miſtreſs; a coincidence which ſtruck her with a thouſand indeſcribable ſenſations;

When I lie tangled in her hair,
And fetter'd with her eye,
The birds that wanton in the air
Know no ſuch liberty.

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Stone walls do not a priſon make,
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for an hermitage:
If I have freedom in my love,
And in my ſoul am free,
Angels alone that ſoar above
Enjoy ſuch liberty."

though

though it was, ſhe thought, poſſible that it was *not* on account of that coincidence brought forward by Marchmont. She felt, however, her cheeks dyed with bluſhes; and to conceal her confuſion ſhe paſſed lightly over the anſwer, and recurred again to Mr. Everſley.

"Since you are ſo good," ſaid ſhe, "as to allow me to take an intereſt in a ſituation which even thoſe who have not the pleaſure of knowing you muſt lament, ſuffer me to conſult with Mr. Everſley. I am no ſtranger to the reſtraint he labours under from the unhappy temper and narrow prejudices of his wife; but by means of his ſiſter I am ſure we may correſpond on the poſſibility of ſerving you, without rendering him liable to her ill-humour."

"I cannot expreſs, Miſs Dacres," interrupted Marchmont, "how much I feel your goodneſs; but there are objections—invincible, unconquerable objections. . . . . It is impoſſible," added he,

he, "to trouble you with them: but be aſſured, that if I had any thing to hope from his friendſhip, without committing my friend, I would not heſitate:—as it is, I muſt take my reſolution, and already I feel that I ought not to have given you the concern I have done. I am conſcious that I have acted wrong—and yet, perhaps, if I dared relate at length the circumſtances that have led me into this, the narrative might, to ſuch a mind as yours, plead my apology."

"None is neceſſary, Sir," ſaid Althea in a low voice; "I beg you will not think of me, unleſs it be how I can render you any ſervice in regard to your preſent difficulties. I am very much afraid, from the detention of your ſervant, that they may multiply around you; and I own, my horror of the man they call Vampyre is ſuch, that nothing would give me more pain than that he ſhould make another viſit here more ſucceſsful than the laſt."

"For

"For that reaſon," replied Marchmont, "it were on all accounts wiſer to meet, rather than to await the evil; and I truſt I have, by reflection, ſo far ſubdued the rage and indignation that this villanous fellow uſed to excite, that I ſhall calmly acquieſce in an inevitable misfortune, without too much conſidering the infamous agent."

"Surely," ſaid Althea, "it would be better were you to attempt eſcaping to the continent till ſome ſettlement can be brought about. I think I have heard you have relations in France?"

"Yes," anſwered Marchmont; "a branch of my family are naturalized there. But if you conſider, Madam, the anceſtors from whom the Baron de Lavergnac is deſcended, you will immediately conclude, that if he ſtill remains on his eſtate, of which I have many doubts, it is but little in his power to afford protection to a ſtranger—and a ſtranger, whoſe country alone would now render

render him liable to impriſonment. And whether I am to paſs my life in the Fleet, or the Abbaye—whether I am to exiſt under the tyranny of Robeſpierre, or a victim to the chicanery of Vampyre, ſeems to me a matter ſo immaterial, that it ought not to induce me to croſs the water to embrace the one, or eſcape the other. Indeed I have another objection, which is, that by going to the Baron de Lavergnac, admitting it were poſſible to reach him, I ſhould, perhaps, diſturb the ſecurity which, from his age and retired habits of life, it is poſſible he may have been able to preſerve, notwithſtanding his decided abhorrence of the preſent rulers in France. It is now ſo many months ſince I have heard of him, or any part of his family, that perhaps while I ſpeak of them they exiſt no longer. His ſon was in Spain when I had the laſt news of them. His grandſon, a young man of two-and-twenty, had, till then, remained at Lavergnac: but

but notwithſtanding all the inducements he had to continue at home, the anxious ſolicitude of the venerable old Baron, the agonizing fears of a mother who adores him, and probably the tender and ſeducing affection of a very lovely young woman, to whom he was ſeven or eight months ago on the point of being united; notwithſtanding all theſe ties, I cannot but believe my younger relation has either joined his father, or found means to get into Italy or Germany. Would I knew where he is! I had rather join him, though our principles do not exactly accord, than wander about without any fixed purpoſe, or give to the kind-hearted old Baron another cauſe of anxiety. . . . . But indeed," continued Marchmont, after a ſhort pauſe, "to go into the army as he is probably gone is in every man's power; and if my mother could be prevailed upon to hear of it with patience, why ſhould it not be in mine?"

Althea,

Althea, from a certain uncomfortable feeling about her heart, doubted whether even the risk of long imprisonment was not preferable. The longer this conference lasted, the less prospect there appeared of her being able to execute those friendly projects on which she had meditated before they met: yet, while her hopes of being instrumental in saving him grew fainter, her wishes that she might do so acquired new force; and notwithstanding all there was to fear should his present abode become known to Sir Audley, she could not without extreme pain think of his delivering himself to the mercileſs men who purſued him. His uncertainty whither to go, if he could for a while eſcape them; the ſituation of every part of his own family, who in times more tranquil would have protected him; the unfeeling dereliction of his relations on the ſide of his mother, who had ſo much the power to befriend him; even the fortitude to which he endeavoured

endeavoured to give the appearance of calm indifference, while he prepared to meet the deſtiny which awaited him; all combined to increaſe the intereſt Althea took in that deſtiny. And why ſhould it be concealed that the greateſt, perhaps the only error he was guilty of, had no power to weaken this intereſt? Marchmont, far from ſaying it, did not certainly even acknowledge to himſelf, that the ſtrangeneſs of his comfortleſs ſituation, as far as related to his concealment at Eaſtwoodleigh, was rather ſought for on his part than avoided: and though he knew every circumſtance relative to Althea's fortune, and that nothing was leſs likely ever to be within the reach of poſſibility, than that *he* could be liſtened to as a lover; yet ſo far had the ſtrength of thoſe impreſſions he had received in their former interviews got the better of his reaſon, that he could not forbear availing himſelf of

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an opportunity to be near her—and adding to all the other misfortunes of his life, that of indulging a paſſion which he knew ought *not* to be ſucceſsful.

When he had firſt conſented to hide himſelf among the ſecret paſſages of his paternal houſe, he perſuaded himſelf that he had no purpoſe in concealment but to eſcape from his perſecutors, and to contemplate, without her having any idea of his being near her, this charming girl, in the exerciſe of all thoſe virtues, of which he had already heard ſo much even before the grateful loquacity of Mrs. Moſely had made her the conſtant ſubject of panegyric. Marchmont imagined that it was poſſible to conſider her as ſome being of a ſuperior order, altogether out of his reach, but whoſe beneficence and beauty it was gratifying to contemplate. Conſciouſneſs of the impropriety of his being thus concealed under the ſame roof, was only an additional inducement to the ſtrict vigilance he otherwiſe

otherwiſe meant to obſerve. He was ſure of Wansford as long as he could pay him, nor indeed had he any reaſon to doubt his honeſty or humanity; and he had almoſt exhauſted his laſt reſource to inflame, by the moſt powerful of all arguments, his natural averſion to attorneys, and the particular antipathy he knew Vampyre muſt create wherever he appeared. For ſome time he had reſolution enough to adhere to the conduct he had determined upon; and for a while, the drearineſs of his confinement, amidſt the rigours of winter, was ſweetened by a tranſient view of Althea from a window, by hearing her voice in the ſpacious paſſages, as ſhe came into the deſerted building, or by catching at a diſtance its ſweeter ſound, as ſhe ſang to her own playing amid the ſilence of a ſtill evening. But inſenſibly he found, that the more he indulged this growing attachment, the more importunate were its demands; and when,

when in conſequence of her alarm ariſing from the ſight of his dog, ſhe for ſome days forbore to renew her walks in the gallery, his concealment became ſo intolerable to him, that he was on the point of leaving it; but Althea appeared again, and again the deſolate apartments which he had ſo much reaſon to contemplate with an aching heart, appeared to him to be irradiated by the preſence of an angel.

His faithful terrier, which had only once broke from the command he had over it, was then more ſtrictly kept to his obedience; and Marchmont finding that Althea reſumed her ſolitary exerciſe, determined to be ſo much on his guard, that nothing ſhould betray him, while he might ſtill be gratified by the pleaſure of hearing her ſpeak, or even by a diſtant view as ſhe paſſed the end of the paſſages into which he had the means of looking as he lay hid. For this

purpoſe he had on the day he was diſcovered taking his ſtation in a room whither he knew the legends of Mrs. Moſely would prevent her coming. The circumſtance of the children's playing in a cloſet which had a window looking into it, he could not foreſee: the alarm (which he diſtinctly heard) once given, numberleſs reaſons, or what appeared to be reaſons, concurred to determine him on appearing. The abſence of his ſervant indeed made it a matter of ſelf-preſervation; but that alone would probably have influenced him leſs than the fear of having terrified Althea, and of ſeeing her no more; while her kindneſs in regard to his mother and ſiſters, of which Mrs. Moſely had informed him; the generous pity ſhe had expreſſed when they met in the park at Capelſtoke; her general character, and, in ſhort, an impulſe too ſtrong to be reſiſted, were united to conquer all his prudent

prudent reſolutions, and determined him to throw himſelf at her feet.

In the firſt converſation that followed, the tender compaſſion which ſhe ſeemed to feel for him, and the ingenuous confidence ſhe placed in him, were but too well calculated to increaſe a paſſion, which, as he never intended to ſpeak of it to its object, he indulged becauſe he thought it could hurt nobody but himſelf.

This ſecond interview had nearly overcome his reſolution; and nothing but reflecting on the cruelty and ingratitude of giving pain to that boſom which already felt ſo keenly for him as a friend, could have deterred him from following, with ſome more poſitive declaration of his ſentiments, what half involuntarily eſcaped him about Colonel Lovelace. While he yet ſpoke to Althea, or liſtened to her compaſſionate propoſals, his heart ſmote him for the concern he had thus inflicted on her.

But it was now too late to recede; yet ſo uncertain was he what he ought to do, or indeed could do, that after a converſation of near two hours they parted, without having come to any determination, except that Althea ſhould that evening let Wansford know ſhe was acquainted with Marchmont's concealment, concert with him the means of ſupplying him with neceſſary food, and conſult with him by what means Fenchurch could be traced—for no circumſtance was ſo alarming as his abſence. Althea, after ſome debate, at length believed ſhe had convinced Marchmont that he ought yet to delay any final determination for a few days. They then, with viſible reluctance on the ſide of Marchmont, and with almoſt equal, though ſtifled concern on that of Althea, parted for the day—but not till ſhe had engaged to leave for him in the ſtore-room of their hoſt ſome books, with which he might beguile the long, long

hours

hours of his impriſonment; for every horror that preſent anguiſh, or recollection of the paſt, could accumulate, returned upon him the moment he had cloſed the door of the hall after Althea.

CHAP. VIII.

Why, Courage then!—What cannot be avoided,
'Twere childiſh weakneſs to lament or fear!

IT required ſome contrivance on the part of Althea to obtain a long conference with Wansford without the knowledge of his wife. She effected it, however, and with heſitation and reluctance diſcloſed to him the knowledge ſhe had gained of Marchmont's concealment.

Althea was, unfortunately perhaps for her, a great reader of countenances—decidedly a diſciple of Lavater's; ſhe fancied that, as far as her ſmall knowledge of the world allowed her to judge, his

his ſcience was by no means ſo chimerical or illuſive as Sir Audley and many other men of the world held it to be; and ſhe believed ſhe had often diſcovered the thoughts of thoſe with whom ſhe converſed, when they leaſt intended ſhe ſhould have any idea of them. Attentive therefore to the expreſſion of the man's face to whom ſhe was now talking, ſhe imagined, amidſt all the reſpect he expreſſed for her, that there was a lurking ſneer, when he found how well ſhe was acquainted with Marchmont's hiſtory, and how much intereſt ſhe evidently took in it. This might be, and probably was, fancy; but Althea felt mortified and uneaſy. She failed not to recollect how groſs are the apprehenſions of the lower ranks of people, and that, even with greater precipitance than influences thoſe but a little above them in ſtation (and often not at all more refined in underſtanding), they decide, that it is impoſſible

two young people of different ſexes can converſe together otherwiſe than as lovers.

To obviate this impreſſion, which ſhe ſaw, or believed ſhe ſaw, that Wansford entertained, Althea ſpoke with peculiar earneſtneſs on the neceſſity of Marchmont's going; to which Wansford heartily aſſented.—"Aye, my dear young lady!" ſaid he, "you don't know half the danger. I heard laſt night that Vampyre was at T********, which is, you know, but ſeven miles off, or ſo—and what can a want there? I don't know, for my part, what's to be done! The poor young man cannot be hid much longer, that's for certain; but if he offers for to go—ah! he'll be taken by ſome of that old villain's followers, as ſure as I am I."

As all this was not more than the fears of Althea had already ſuggeſted to her, ſhe did not ſuffer any new alarm to miſlead her from every enquiry that ſhe

ſhe thought might give her light as to what was the beſt courſe for her unhappy friend. Wansford had too ſtrongly marked the common traits in his character. He loved money, and hated tricking attorneys; for he had owed to the chicane of one of that deſcription that he had been turned out of his farm. His avarice thus counteracted, the honeſt feelings of humanity had room for their influence; and though he might have made money by betraying his unfortunate gueſt to his purſuers, he reſiſted the temptation, and was eagerly anxious for his ſafety.

Althea, who had the faculty, uncommon at her age, of reading the ſentiments of thoſe with whom ſhe converſed, ſaw, with ſatisfaction, that Wansford might be depended upon; ſhe therefore entruſted him, though not without much heſitation and confuſion, with her wiſhes as to affording to Marchmont ſuch pecuniary aſſiſtance as might enable

him to quit his preſent comfortleſs abode, and convey himſelf out of the reach of his perſecutors.

At the mention of this Althea thought ſhe ſaw all thoſe half-formed ſuſpicions ariſe in the mind of Wansford, which ſhe was ſo unwilling he ſhould harbour. He found it difficult to imagine, that a young lady or any other perſon would give their money without ſome particular liking to thoſe on whom it was beſtowed. Of that intereſt which compaſſion for his ſingular ſituation, or mere friendſhip, could raiſe in his favour, Wansford was incapable of forming any notion. Whatever were his ideas, he endeavoured carefully to conceal them, and told Althea that he thought he could, by means of Mrs. Moſely, convey to Marchmont whatever ſhe deſired, without his knowing from whence it came. She directed him to proceed to do ſo with the utmoſt circumſpection; and having thus done all that was at preſent

preſent poſſible, ſhe endeavoured to quiet her ſpirits, and to think of other ſubjects beſides the merits, ſufferings, and danger of Marchmont.

But her tranquillity had been too much diſturbed, and her imagination too much affected. Secluded ſo long from all ſociety and every ſcene of active life, the ſtrange circumſtances under which ſhe found herſelf had doubly the power to affect her, while to the firſt favourable impreſſion ſhe had received of Marchmont was added all that intereſt which pity could excite in a generous mind. However earneſtly ſhe tried to check ſuch thoughts, ſhe could not help ſometimes regretting (what had never given her any concern before) the ſmallneſs of her fortune, and reflecting on the happineſs it would afford whoever had the power to reſcue from his ſad deſtiny a young man of ſo much merit. To her ſhe knew he never could owe this obligation, yet ſhe felt a comfortleſs

ſenſation when ſhe endeavoured to wiſh that he might receive it from another.—Two days now paſſed, in which ſhe knew nothing but what ſhe gueſſed from the nods and ſhrugs of Wansford, who either could not or would not find an opportunity of converſing with her.—He was abſent twice during that time, and Althea concluded he was ſettling ſomething to effect her preſent purpoſe with Dame Moſely.

In the afternoon, however, of the third day of her ſuſpenſe, ſhe ſaw him under her window, which, on the ſigns he made, ſhe haſtily opened. He gave into her hands a letter.

Althea did not know the hand; but the countenance and manner of the man awakened ſo much apprehenſion, that ſhe had hardly courage to read it.—Caſting her eyes on the ſignature at the bottom, ſhe ſaw the name of Marchmont, and trembled as ſhe ran over the following lines——

"MADAM,

"MADAM,

"Every hour, ſince I firſt dared to intrude myſelf and my ſorrows upon your notice, has increaſed my reſpect and admiration, by affording me ſome new inſtance of an exalted mind and an excellent heart; but the laſt proof you have given of your generoſity calls upon me for all my gratitude, though I cannot, I dare not accept it.

"Notwithſtanding the contrivances of the poor old woman at the cottage, and my friend Wansford, I know the offer I have received of pecuniary aſſiſtance could come only from you. I will not enter on the reaſons that abſolutely forbid my accepting it; Miſs Dacres is too candid to impute it to ill-placed pride, when I preſume to add, that if ſhe can, in any way not prejudicial to herſelf, befriend my dear unhappy mother, my young and unprotected ſiſters, ſhe will find that the

Marchmonts

Marchmonts are not too proud to be grateful.

"Alas! Madam, thoſe victims to misfortune can never more than now want your pity—for I muſt leave England. The ſon, the brother whom they fondly wiſhed to retain in the ſame country (though he has long been deprived of the power of protecting or ſupporting them), muſt yield at laſt to an inevitable evil, and make his election between impriſonment and exile.

"I prefer the latter—for Miſs Dacres condeſcended to give her opinion that it was the moſt adviſable. There is no time to heſitate, for the fiend who purſues me is again animated to my deſtruction. My faithful ſervant Fenchurch has eſcaped by ſomething like a miracle from the toils this wretch laid for him, and, as good is ſometimes derived from evil, has, in his flight, diſcovered a means of my getting from hence by ſea—and the opportunity is likely

likely to offer ſo ſoon, that I ſhall quit my *paternal priſon* in the middle of the approaching night, and conceal myſelf in a place on the ſhore well known to me in happier days; from whence, with the tide at noon, a boat is engaged to carry me on board a veſſel bound to Guernſey: from thence I ſhall croſs to France, and endeavour to diſcover what is become of the Baron de Lavergnac and his family—to whom it is poſſible I may be uſeful.

"I would refrain from expreſſing, becauſe I am conſcious that I ought to do it, the pain I feel at the idea of ſeeing you no more. I am not ſo weak and vain as to preſume on the kindneſs you have condeſcended to ſhew me. I know I owe it only to the tenderneſs and humanity of your nature; nor am I capable of forgetting the diſtance to which fortune has thrown me, from all I might once have aſpired to. Perhaps you ought not to forgive me the uſeleſs weakneſs

weakneſs of owning, that thus to repreſs ſentiments which under other circumſtances it would have been the pride and glory of my life to avow, is among the moſt ſevere of thoſe trials to which my deſtiny condemns me.

"I ſubmit, however—for I have no right to hazard giving a moment's pain to others; I ſubmit—but will not that generoſity I am already ſo greatly obliged to, pardon me for aſking, even, though it cannot perhaps grant, the only favour I will now venture to ſolicit?

"It is, that before I take a *long*, perhaps a *laſt* leave of my country, I may ſee the only friend who is within my reach.—(My mother, my ſiſters are afar off!)—Is it too preſumptuous if I name Miſs Dacres as that friend? if I entreat her to allow me to attempt expreſſing by words all that gratitude I owe her—and to recommend to her the dear unhappy family I leave? Believe me, Madam, *I* never will intrude upon you

you again; but it will mitigate the anguiſh which I feel when I conſider *how* I have left them, if I can aſſure myſelf that they have ſo great an alleviation as your humanity can beſtow—and if you will deign to ſee me before I get into the boat which is to carry me from this now inhoſpitable ſhore, my poor mother, oppreſſed with too many ſorrows already, will at leaſt know from you that I departed with fortitude; and to *her* you will appear as a guardian angel, whoſe preſence and whoſe wiſhes ſhall ſecure the ſafety of her ſon.

"The information Fenchurch has brought me, as well as what I have received to-day from Wansford, convinces me that I riſk much by remaining another night beneath this roof. If I did, I dare not again ſolicit an interview here, but to-morrow the tide does not allow me to depart from my wild retreat on the ſhore till about twelve o'clock;—it is little more than a mile and a half from

from this place. Wansford tells me his eldeſt girl knows the road.—Ah! Miſs Dacres! I am conſcious how little right I have to aſk ſuch a favour of you; but if your goodneſs extends ſo far as to forgive my preſumption and indulge my weakneſs, be aſſured I ſhall eſteem ſuch an obligation greater than any of thoſe I already owe you. There may be impropriety in your granting me ſuch a requeſt; but if you knew how many reaſons combine to make me aſk it, how grateful I ſhall be, and how much ſuch condeſcenſion will ſoften the ſeverity of my deſtiny—I dare venture to believe you would not refuſe it.—Ah! Madam! were it poſſible to convince you of the veneration, the reſpect I feel for your virtues, you would not ſuſpect that I would aſk what would be derogatory to that gentle dignity, which is one among the thouſand graces that ſurround you. Let me not, however, adopt a ſtyle which may offend, even

from

from its ſincerity. I know not how to conclude, though conſcious I have ſaid too much. Allow me to aſſure you of the gratitude and eſteem with which I muſt ever be,

"Madam,

"Your moſt devoted ſervant,

"EDWARD-ARMYN MARCHMONT."

The thoughts of Althea were never ſo confuſed as after the haſty peruſal of this letter. Indeed ſhe read it in ſuch diſorder of ſpirits, that, when ſhe came to the end, ſhe hardly underſtood what was its purpoſe; and it was not before a third peruſal that ſhe was enabled to conſider, with ſome degree of calmneſs, whether ſhe ought, or could comply with the requeſt it contained.

It was impoſſible to miſtake the meaning of thoſe half explanatory ſentences; or, if they had admitted of any other interpretation, the former conduct of Marchmont left little doubt of his attachment

tachment to her.—— On her part ſhe had, from their earlieſt acquaintance, been conſcious of a favourable opinion of him, which, without pretending to combat (becauſe to think well of him was merely juſtice), ſhe had endeavoured to confine within the bounds of friendſhip. The objections to any more intimate connection between them were inſurmountable; they never appeared otherwiſe to Althea: and ſhe had been taught ſo well to regulate her mind, that ſhe was hardly ſenſible of the preference ſhe gave Marchmont over all the men ſhe had ever ſeen, before ſhe endeavoured to check the wiſhes which involuntarily aroſe, that he had the fortune poſſeſſed by this or that faſhionable acquaintance of Sir Audley, who neither deſerved or knew how to be happy with the great incomes they poſſeſſed.

The very effort not to think of him, but as an unfortunate young man of uncommon merit, brought him more frequently

quently to her mind. Then occurred the benevolent hope of being able to promote his intereſt with her father; and when that hope vaniſhed, ſhe found herſelf ſtrangely fixed, by her father's orders, in the very ſpot where the misfortunes of the Marchmont family were continually preſent to her, and where ſhe met a faithful chronicler of their virtues. The meeting him in this ſcene, the perſecution of which he was the object, the comfortleſs ſtate he was reduced to, his fortitude and filial tenderneſs—all combined to complete her predilection, though obſtacles to their being ever any other than friends were rather increaſed than removed.

With all her underſtanding and command over her reaſon, Althea was ſtill but a woman; young, and poſſeſſed of a degree of ſenſibility which the attentive friend of her early years had ſeen with ſome pain, and invariably endeavoured to correct.

To

To her it appeared as if Marchmont's having thus taken ſhelter in his paternal houſe, of which ſhe was by ſuch odd circumſtances become an inmate, was an accident that ſeemed providentially ordered, to engage her friendſhip, and promote his relief. Though no one could be leſs diſpoſed to that daring violation of the common rules of ſociety, which ſets at defiance the opinion of the world, yet ſhe ſaw not why ſhe ſhould ſo far enſlave herſelf to a narrow prejudice, as to deny that friendſhip to a worthy object, only becauſe he was a young man. She aſked herſelf, why ſhe ſhould refuſe to act otherwiſe in regard to Marchmont than if he was her brother? Her heart accuſed her of no ill, nor even any imprudent intention; and he had, on his part, explicitly declared he had no hopes of engaging more than her ſiſterly friendſhip. This was probably the laſt time they ſhould ever meet—and ſhe enquired of herſelf, what

would be her future feelings, if ſhe ſhould hear that this unfortunate young man periſhed far from his family, without having had an opportunity of ſpeaking to one friend, before his departure, of all that muſt neceſſarily lay on his heart in regard to the mother and ſiſters from whom he was driven? Beſides, as he refuſed the pecuniary aſſiſtance which Wansford had awkwardly betrayed to him her intention of offering, ſhe could not be eaſy without knowing how he had obtained what made that aſſiſtance unneceſſary. The laſt queſtion Althea made in this monologue was, how Mrs. Trevyllian would have ordered her to act, could ſhe know of the circumſtances ſhe was in?—and recalling to her mind the univerſal benevolence of her aunt's mind; her diſdain of thoſe narrow and groſs prejudices which often check the innocent and honeſt purpoſes of the heart; and again repeating that Marchmont could never be to her other than

than a brother, the queſtion was finally decided, and ſhe determined to go.

Nothing then remained but for her to contrive the means of letting him know it immediately. For this purpoſe ſhe ſought Wansford; whom luckily meeting alone, as he either was or pretended to be ſettling his farm accounts, ſhe wrote a ſhort note to Marchmont, which was ſoon conveyed to him.—Wansford, returning, was about to tell her at what hour his perſecuted gueſt was to depart in the night, and much other intelligence, which Althea certainly deſired to have; but as his wife was heard at that moment to come in from the village, all he had time to ſay was, that his eldeſt girl ſhould be ordered to ſhew her in the morning to the head-land, under which was the concealment of Marchmont.—"You had better, Madam," ſaid he, "tell the child that you can find your way back; and ſend her away. Indeed, if you come along

along upon the ſhore, you will ſee Malbourne church juſt upon the brow, a quarter of a mile or ſo; and if you keep up towards it, you can't miſs the path that brings you over the fields on the left, for you preſently get a ſight of Eaſtwoodleigh."

Althea, who thought a great deal more of the interview with Marchmont than how ſhe ſhould herſelf return home from ſo ſhort a walk, aſſured Wansford ſhe could eaſily find her way back, and then left him—trembling at the idea of her having given a promiſe, yet not wiſhing to revoke it.

For ſome hours, ſleep abſolutely refuſed to befriend her. The vague intelligence ſhe had received, as well from Marchmont's letter as from the obſcure hints of Wansford, impreſſed her with dread. She imagined that the ſatellites of the brutal Vampyre lurked round the houſe, and that, even amidſt the darkneſs of the night, Marchmont would

find it difficult to eſcape. Full of theſe fears, ſhe liſtened to every noiſe—and imagined more than ſhe heard. A low wind ſighed along the paſſages, and ſhook at intervals the great old ſaſh frames of her window—then ſunk entirely away; and, in the ſtill pauſe that followed, ſhe fancied there were perſons paſſing ſlowly and lightly beneath, among the weeds and graſs which covered what had once been a great court-yard. Startled at this idea, ſhe left her bed, and went to the window: but the night, though without rain, was dark, and ſhe could not diſcern even the remains of two lions cut in ſtone, which (having once been placed over the great gates) were left among other maſſes of ſtone-work when the iron was ſold, and, from their being white, were diſtinguiſhable when darker objects were loſt in obſcurity. Still a fancied noiſe tormented her—it might, however, be the footſteps of Marchmont himſelf and his

his faithful ſervant.—"Ah!" thought ſhe, "what a comfort it would be to know he was ſafe! To-morrow I may, perhaps, be ſatisfied—but how many hours muſt firſt paſs!"

She now opened the window ſlowly; but nothing appeared, nor was any ſound heard, ſave the owls, who inhabited, in great numbers, the old barns and ruined offices which were on the other ſide of the manſion. Attracted by the light in Althea's window, one of them ſlowly winged its way round the building, and paſſed very near her.—She ſhuddered, not from any abſolute fear, but from the uneaſy ſenſation that any animal, to which ſuperſtition has attached the notion of being *ill-omened*, gives, even to minds the moſt free from its influence. But Althea, after ſome reflection, imagining that the ſullen whiſper of its heavy wings might have been the noiſe that alarmed her, cloſed

the window, and once more retired to her bed.

The dawn, however, found her watching its approach with an anxious and uneasy mind. Before the usual hour she went down to her breakfast; Mrs. Wansford, who attended with it, said her husband had gone out very early upon business, and had told her that Nancy was to be ready at eight o'clock to shew Miss Dacres the nearest way to Hascombe-Strand.—Althea found that the good woman, who had not been accustomed to see things otherwise than they were represented to her by those about her, made no remark on this unusual walk; and, again half-doubting whether she ought to go, yet impatient to set out, hastened her little conductress, and began her expedition.

She now found herself at a greater distance from Eastwoodleigh than she had ever been on the side next the sea, and

and on the other ſide the cottage had hitherto limited her walks. The way was through lanes bounded by elms, which, though not yet in full leaf, were ſo cloſely interwoven in the bank with a luxurious growth of holly, that nothing was to be ſeen beyond them—till on a ſudden the road, aſcending a ſteep hollow way, opened to a kind of common field, forming the top of a high promontory, commanding an immenſe extent of ſea, and, for many miles, the indented cliffs of the weſtern coaſt.—Such was its elevation, that Althea had no notion how it was poſſible to deſcend to the water. With anxious eyes ſhe ſurveyed the expanſe of ocean; it was indeed a "ſhipleſs ſea," neither boat nor any larger veſſel was to be ſeen, and ſhe feared the people Marchmont had expected might have diſappointed him.

The child now ſhewed her a narrow and rugged deſcent, made by cutting

the red clay and ſtones, of which the cliffs are here compoſed, into a ſort of rude ſteps. Here Althea diſmiſſed her guide, bidding her return immediately home; and then, with leſs fear than ſhe might at another time have felt, deſcended to the margin of the ſea.

On reaching it, ſhe found herſelf under an almoſt mural range of rocks, compoſed of dark earth, and broad ſtrata of reddiſh-coloured ſtones, horizontally arranged, as if by the hands of man. The place where ſhe had deſcended ſeemed the only practicable part; for a little farther on the height became tremendous, and the face of the rock perpendicular towards the top, while beneath it was eaten by the water into deep caverns: from one of theſe ſhe expected to ſee Marchmont appear—but, for ſome time, ſhe looked around her in vain.

Vaſt maſſes, fallen from the cliffs, were ſcattered between them and the water at the tide of ebb. With the tide

of

of flood, theſe pieces, worn into groteſque and giant ſhapes, were half-covered by the waves. Already the riſing water broke rippling round the moſt remote craggs—to their rude ſurface, clams, limpets, and muſcles adhered, among the ſea-weed that grew ſtreaming about them. All was wild, ſolitary, and gloomy; the low murmur of the water formed a ſort of accompaniment to the cries of the ſand-piper, the *puffin-awk*; while the ſcreaming gull, and the hoarſe and heavy cormorant, were heard, at intervals, ſtill louder. Althea, as ſhe ſat on a fragment of ſtone, ſurveying the ſcene and liſtening to theſe noiſes, could have fancied herſelf thrown by ſhipwreck on ſome deſert coaſt, where ſhe was left to ſolitude and deſpair.

The tide roſe ſlowly in ſo calm a morning, yet it was now ſo high, that it ſeemed certain the hour could not be far off when Marchmont ex-

pected the boat. Again she feared some disappointment, some accident; and, quitting her rugged seat, went on towards a part where the view along the sands was less impeded by broken rocks. Two persons soon after appeared, one of whom she knew to be Marchmont. As soon as he perceived Althea, he sprang forward to meet her; while the other person, who was, she thought, his servant, retired out of sight.

CHAP.

CHAP. IX.

Ecco quel fiero istante!

IN approaching Althea, the various emotions that agitated the mind of Marchmont were visible on his countenance and manner.—"How very good you are, Miss Dacres, thus to honour me!" said he—"But I must not attempt to express my gratitude; indeed to do so is out of my power:—I am afraid I have made you wait?—I ought to account for such an additional intrusion on your time and humanity—but the boat which is to take me from hence, perhaps for ever, will

very ſoon be here: I have directed it to wait for me behind thoſe projecting rocks."

His heſitation, the confuſed and uneaſy manner in which he uttered theſe abrupt ſentences, and the anguiſh ſo unequivocally marked on his countenance, deeply affected Althea. She trembled, and knew not what to reply. Afraid of expreſſing all ſhe felt, yet equally afraid of appearing cold and repulſive by her ſilence, ſhe meditated how to avoid either; but Marchmont, after pauſing a moment, proceeded:

"I ſolicited this honour, Madam, that, in taking my laſt adieu of my native country, I might——Pardon me!—I hardly know what I would ſay! My fate, however ſevere it has appeared to me, never till *now* was ſo inſupportable! It is no time for diſſimulation; yet I am but too ſenſible, that when I diſſimulate no longer, I riſk the forfeiture of the laſt hope I have on earth. Can you,

ought

ought you to forgive the preſumption of a man, who dares to avow his admiration, his love? knowing that he *ought not* to expect any return—and that his hazarding to ſpeak, may deſervedly ſubject him to the loſs of that generous friendſhip with which you have honoured him?"

All the courage that Althea had been collecting was inſufficient to enable her to articulate an anſwer.—It was now to be decided, whether ſhe ſhould for ever relinquiſh an affection which ſhe had inſenſibly cheriſhed for ſo many months, and to the indulgence of which nothing could be oppoſed but mere worldly prudence, or avow thoſe ſentiments that were the natural effects of uncommon merit on an ingenuous and generous mind—ſentiments which, however ſhe might endeavour to conceal them, were too deeply impreſſed ever to be effaced. Marchmont was indeed poor—a fugitive, and an exile; but, was he there-

fore leſs eſtimable?—The cauſes of his poverty and diſtreſs rendered him infinitely more reſpectable—and was it for *her* to drive him from her, merely becauſe he poſſeſſed not thoſe pecuniary advantages which ſhe contemned? Could ſhe bid him go with an impreſſion that her heart was mercenary and narrow?—Could ſhe ſay, "You are unworthy of my regard, becauſe you are poor: your merit, your birth are nothing, for *I* know no real advantages but money?" It was true, that to encourage his paſſion would be imprudent in the opinion of the world; but, had not her father taught her to renounce the world—while, in ſending her from it, and baniſhing her his houſe, he had left her without any connection to attach her, any duty to fulfil? All theſe thoughts paſſed with rapidity through her mind—they were leſs overwhelming, becauſe many of them had been canvaſſed before; but far from yet having

having the power to expreſs even that part of her ſentiments which ſhe had determined not to diſguiſe, ſhe awaited with a palpitating heart for the concluſion of what Marchmont had to ſay, who, apparently encouraged by her manner, after a ſhort pauſe, went on——

"I know, lovelieſt Miſs Dacres, all the circumſtances of your ſituation—I know that to avoid a deteſted marriage you ſubmitted to the melancholy ſecluſion of Eaſtwoodleigh—and I am well aware, that Fortune has been as niggardly of her favours to you, as Nature has been bountiful. God forbid that *I* ſhould aſk you to ſhare ſuch a deſtiny as *mine!*—I have already felt too ſeverely, in the perſons of thoſe I moſt love, all the humiliations and inconveniences of indigence, to entertain ſuch a thought as that of *your* becoming a party. If the definition of true love be, that it prefers the real good of its object to every other conſideration, I dare aſſert

aſſert that I feel its moſt powerful influence.—Yet, may I not hope to be ſpared the cruel neceſſity of relinquiſhing all proſpect of hearing from you?—of being accounted, whatever may be my deſtiny, among the number of your friends? I will not, however, affect to ſay, that I never mean to aſk more than your friendſhip. Whatever may hitherto have been my diſappointments, a man of my age ought not to deſpair—happier fortune may yet give him hopes of aſpiring to your favour. But I moſt ſolemnly aſſure you, I will never intrude upon your pity till thoſe better proſpects ſhall open to me; and if, before that time arrives, ſome enviable man, in a ſituation more worthy of you, ſhould be deemed deſerving your favour, the unfortunate Marchmont ſhall never be heard to interrupt your felicity with his complaints."

Althea now took courage to ſay, in a low voice—"Alas! Sir, to what can

our

our correſpondence tend, but to render us both unhappy?"

"If it will have that effect on *you*," cried Marchmont, eagerly interrupting her, "I renounce my hopes: but for me—Ah! I have, till this moment, had the preſumption to flatter myſelf..... Yes! I *did* believe that the generoſity of which I have had ſo many proofs would have been extended to this laſt inſtance of pity and regard. It will ſoften to me the horrors of that cruel exile which is the only alternative to a priſon;—it will give me courage to endure a life that I have been ſometimes half-tempted to eſcape from. To you, deareſt Miſs Dacres, how can it be injurious?—If the unfortunate object of your compaſſion is indifferent to you, *your* peace cannot be diſturbed by this act of humanity—If he be not.... but I dare not hope it."

Althea, in increaſed diſtreſs, knew not what to ſay: to refuſe ſeemed inhuman—

man—to conſent, imprudent.—Marchmont ſaw ſhe heſitated.—He purſued his argument with all the ardour lent him by the hope of ſucceſs. He repreſented that, whenever ſhe found any inconvenience from the receipt of his letters, ſhe might deprive him of the happineſs of correſponding with her—that ſhe was accountable to nobody, ſince Sir Audley gave himſelf no trouble to direct her.—He then went on to ſay——

"Of the perſon, Madam, who preſumes to ſolicit ſuch a favour of you, it is fit you ſhould know what has been the courſe of his days. Allow me, ſince I may never again, or not for a very long time, enjoy the happineſs I am now admitted to—allow me to relate the ſhort hiſtory of my life ſince I have been a wanderer in the world. To a mind like that which you poſſeſs, I am perſuaded that to have endured adverſity with ſome degree of reſolution will not

appear

appear leſs meritorious, than not to have abuſed proſperity."

Althea, whoſe agitation this prelude was calculated to increaſe, did not truſt her voice with an anſwer; but ſhe ſeemed willing to give her attention to what he propoſed relating——and Marchmont thus proceeded:

"I believe you have heard from my friend Everſley, and perhaps ſince from the poor old ſervant, the former circumſtances of a family leſs fortunate than known. I will not dwell on the conſequence and fortune it once poſſeſſed; for *ſome* experience and many mortifications have done away what I was once taught to cheriſh—pride, on account of *the days that are gone.*—The moſt painful part of a life, of which none has yet been very fortunate, was *that* when I ſaw my father vainly ſtruggling with the preſſure of adverſity; and, towards the cloſe of his life, ſacrificing his own eaſe and quiet, which he might in

in a great meaſure have poſſeſſed, in the hope of preſerving for *me* the remaining part of my patrimony, and that great houſe of which you are now an inhabitant. I ſaw the hopeleſſneſs of the attempt—I knew, that if to ſave the ruins of our fortune had been poſſible, they could never have enabled me to live at Eaſtwoodleigh. But my poor father heard all my remarks on this ſubject, whenever he ſuffered it to be diſcuſſed, with ſomething like reſentment at my want of what *he* thought proper and laudable ambition; and it became a point of duty, that I ſhould remain a ſilent though wretched ſpectator of the Siſyphean labour to which his tenderneſs for me condemned him.——It was under a ſort of diſſimulation of my real purpoſe that I obtained permiſſion of him to go, about two years ſince, to France. When I was there, I thought that a favourable proſpect opened for my entering into buſineſs at Bourdeaux; but

but two things were neceſſary—my father's conſent, and ſome money—neither of which I had much hope of procuring. However the change of ideas, which was then rapidly making progreſs in France, helped greatly to facilitate my ſcheme. The Baron de Lavergnac, notwithſtanding the principles of his family and the habits of his life, was reaſonable enough to liſten to my arguments; and he not only offered me his purſe and his credit, but undertook to conquer the prejudices of my father. He in a great degree ſucceeded; I was received into an eminent mercantile houſe at Bourdeaux. You know how the Revolution in France, which at its beginning wore, I thought, a more auſpicious appearance, has overturned in its progreſs the proſperity of trade, which it affected to enlarge and to protect: the houſe, into which I had been received as one of the younger partners, and whoſe commercial intereſt I thought myſelf

myſelf likely to promote by my Engliſh connections, was one of the firſt that was ſwept away in the increaſing tempeſt.—I returned to England, without any other advantage than that of having acquired ſuch an additional knowledge of a language I was before a tolerable proficient in, that I might perhaps paſs as well for a native of France as of England."

"Alas! I came back, diſappointed myſelf, to witneſs the more bitter diſappointments of my poor father—who, during my abſence, had been making new efforts, every one of which was eventually injurious not only to his temporary tranquillity, but to the wreck of that property he was ſo ſolicitous to keep together. It would only be giving you pain, Miſs Dacres, were I to relate all that I then went through. I now reflect on it with ſenſations ſo uneaſy, that I am glad to avert my thoughts from every recollection, but the only one that gives

gives me any comfort—that every moment of my time was given to ſmooth for my unhappy parent the downward path of life.—Ah! Miſs Dacres, he was driven prematurely thither by diſtreſs of mind! by the cruelty of . . . . . ”

Althea ſhuddered:—the idea that Sir Audley had by his ſeverity contributed to the ſad cloſe of the life of this unhappy father, was more than ſhe could calmly bear. Marchmont ſaw her emotion—and inſtantly gueſſing the cauſe, repented of what he had ſaid, and haſtened to relate other circumſtances that might carry her mind from it.

“ I loſt this venerated and lamented parent—with what anguiſh of heart I need not ſay. It was neceſſary, however, to check my own feelings, or at leaſt to conceal them, that I might not increaſe the ſad ſufferings of my mother, who, ill as ſhe thought of the ſituation of her family, knew not the extent of the evil; my father having always

always concealed the worſt from her, with impolitic affection—which was, however, at leaſt an amiable weakneſs. He could not bear to ſee her unhappy; and my mother, in the ſame view of ſaving *him* from pain, concealed how far her knowledge of the truth went, or how much ſhe was affected by what ſhe knew.

"It was upon the ſame principle of concealing, what it would quite have killed her to have known, that I haſtily agreed to any propoſition made me by the villain Vampyre, to ſave even a moment's delay, leſt the inhuman ſtep he took in ſtopping the remains of my father on the day of his burial ſhould be known to her. I have ſince heard that all he did then was entirely illegal. But I was ignorant myſelf of all the chicanery of the law; I had no friend near me whom I could at that moment conſult, for Everſley dared not appear, or aſſiſt me, on account of his wife; and when

when a certain time had paſſed after theſe illegal acts, I found all my attempts at redreſs ſet aſide by certain rules and forms, of which I underſtand no more than I do of the cauſes, why the beſt of all poſſible laws are often abuſed, to the very worſt of all poſſible purpoſes.

"In this caſe, as indeed too often happens, my intentions were wholly counteracted, and that which was done to ſave my mother from one diſtreſs, brought upon her another—another, which has never ceaſed to preſs upon her ſince—for from the engagement I was then compelled to enter into I have never ſince been able to diſengage myſelf.—It has driven me firſt into concealment, and now into exile."

A pauſe, that ſeemed to be the effect of the bitter recollections which aroſe in his mind, now gave an opportunity for Althea to ſay,

"But your friend Everſley?—Could not

not he have come forward in ſo trying a moment?—Ought he not?"

"Ah! Miſs Dacres, my friend Everſley had already done but too much for me. The friendly aſſiſtance he had afforded my father had almoſt exhauſted the reſources that were peculiarly his own, and I knew had embroiled him with that vulgar and violent woman his wife—who, having been unable during their marriage to find any other cauſe of reproach, had fixed upon his generoſity to *my* family as an unfailing ſubject of remonſtrance and rage. To ſuch miſery on my account I could not determine to expoſe a man ſo ſincerely my friend, and to whom I already owed ſo many obligations.—Yet ſuch was his kindneſs, that, when I abſolutely refuſed to ſuffer his pecuniary interference to an amount ſo conſiderable as would have releaſed me from the inveterate malice of Vampyre, he employed the

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ſum he had prepared for that purpoſe, or at leaſt all he could raiſe, in repurchaſing for my mother an annuity of eighty pounds a year, hers and my ſiſter's ſole dependance, which in the laſt days of my father's life ſhe had ſold, as the only means that offered to prevent thoſe ſad days from being embittered by the intruſion of bailiffs and attorneys into the very chamber where he lay dying!"

Again the voice of Marchmont failed him, but in a moment he conquered his emotion, and went on—

"On the noble humanity of ſuch a friend, I determined, whatever I might ſuffer, no farther to treſpaſs. Could I indeed have got over my reluctance to accept, what I knew coſt him all the domeſtic tranquillity which he had made ſo many ſacrifices to preſerve; I could never have conſented to exhauſt for my own convenience that friendly aſſiſtance, which might hereafter be ne-

ceſſary to thoſe whoſe eaſe was infinitely dearer to me than my own. I was young, and active; my ſpirit was yet unbroken by perſonal diſappointment, for I had hardly on my own account entered the world. I am naturally of a ſanguine temper; and though I had already been enough initiated into the ſchool of adverſity, to have diſcovered that there were villains among mankind, ſuch as in the happy ſimplicity of early youth I had not ſuppoſed could exiſt; yet, I rather believed we had been particularly unfortunate in the perſons with whom we had had dealings, than that *many* ſuch were to be found in the great maſs of ſociety.

"With theſe impreſſions, and with perhaps a preſumptuous reliance on my own powers, I courageouſly began a career, in which, though I knew many others had failed, I for a while believed I might ſucceed, and by dint of my own efforts reſcue my family from pecuniary

cuniary diſtreſs, and myſelf from the wretchedneſs of dependence. You will ſmile, perhaps, if I tell you that I was ſo new to the world in which I was to ſtruggle, and ſo confident of the buoyant powers of my own mind, that I believed theſe important purpoſes might be effected by authorſhip. You have undoubtedly read the life of the unhappy Chatterton, which, with that of many other luckleſs projectors in the ſame viſionary purſuit, ought to have ſerved as a warning againſt theſe preſumptuous and airy hopes. But, though conſcious that I had leſs genius, I thought I could guard againſt many of the errors young authors have fallen into; and I even flattered myſelf that the friends of my family, who would not come forward before, would promote my intereſt when they ſaw my exertion; while others, I ſuppoſed, would eſteem me for the motive by which that exertion was induced. In theſe ſpeculations I was not wholly

diſappointed. Some who had intereſt in the world of faſhion were not unwilling to *chaperon* my firſt appearance; but among theſe were not to be reckoned any of my own family—for, if any thing could have rouſed the avaricious apathy of Lady Silcheſter, and ſome of the reſt of my mother's relations, to give me either their intereſt with government, or their pecuniary help, it would have been their diſlike to having an author among their relatives. However, as they loved money better than even the indulgence of this ridiculous pride, they firſt endeavoured to divert me from my purpoſe by promiſing, if I would turn my attention to another line, that they would try to get me ſome ſmall place. I had heard, and been thoroughly convinced, of the futility of ſuch promiſes before: I refuſed, therefore, to loſe a moment in liſtening to them. They affected anger at my doubts of their executing what they promiſed, and againſt the ſhame of being related to

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an author, found a ready reſource in wholly neglecting him. Indeed, from the hour when the fortunes of my father began evidently to decline, the relations of my mother, who never had ſhewn her much attention, began to withdraw from any connection with her or her children; and till I was once more forced upon the notice of Lady Silcheſter by one of her acquaintance, ſhe had affected to loſe ſight of us for ſome years. What *ſhe* did not do, the reſt of the family who were one degree farther removed, thought themſelves happily exempted from undertaking. I found others, however, who had, as I believed, more power to forward my views in the line I had adopted. I was conſidered as a young man of great promiſe by ſome of thoſe perſons zealous for literature and the arts, who love to have their names often appear as protectors of infant genius; but, to the advantage I was to derive from their countenance,

I found ſome conditions annexed not very conſiſtent with the ſpirit of independence which I had determined to preſerve — for it was neceſſary, if I would avail myſelf of literary patronage, to ſacrifice my own opinion to the judgement and experience of theſe my protectors; which I was not always modeſt and diffident enough to do without reluctance, and it happened unfortunately that no two of them thought alike.— However, as an experiment how far uſing their ſagacity was preferable to truſting to my own inexperience, I conſented to follow the advice of him who ſeemed to me the beſt judge of literary buſineſs, and he undertook to ſhew me how I might lengthen a trifling *jeu d'eſprit* that had met with ſome applauſe, into a long poem. It coſt me a good deal of labour; but when it was publiſhed, inſtead of the profits on which I had calculated, I found myſelf conſiderably indebted to the printer and publiſher;

publiſher; and was told, what I was ſoon convinced was true, that nobody now ever thinks of reading a poem of above twenty lines—that poetry is quite out of faſhion—and that the ſhelves in the bookſellers' warehouſes are loaded with poetry unread and unknown: that there has not been above one ſucceſsful poem for the laſt ten years; and that a party only agreeing to praiſe his works, or ſome unaccountable caprice of faſhion, gives a poet the leaſt chance of popularity, even if he is lucky enough to eſcape the blight of criticiſm, which often withers his poetical laurels before they are even unfolded.

"My good Sir," ſaid the perſon, who from experience gave me all this information, "my good Sir, this is not a poetical age.—I aſſure you, that, whatever may be your talents, nothing can be done in that way, and I verily believe the very beſt poems will not pay for the printing. If you have no turn for po-

litics, which indeed is a line now almoſt over-occupied, turn your thoughts to novel writing—narrative, let it be about what it will, is read, becauſe the mind quietly acquieſces, and it requires no trouble to think about it. On your part it will demand much leſs care in the compoſition. Never mind improbabilities—put together a ſufficient number of facts—the more unlikely the better. If you are too idle to chooſe the trouble of inventing, collect eight or nine of the moſt popular works of that ſort; take a piece of one, and a piece of another, and put them together, only a little altered, juſt to diſguiſe them: never mind whether what the painters call *keeping*, can in this motley aſſemblage be attended to; nobody thinks about that: ſprinkle the whole plentifully with horrors of ſome ſort or other, to ſtimulate the languid attention, and you will have a certainty of a ſale at leaſt among the circulating libraries, which, after all, is the

principal

principal ſale that can be expected; for who buy novels?—Who indeed buy books at all in theſe times? unleſs it be men of ſcience who cannot do without them. However, if you can produce any thing tolerably new in this line, your will do pretty well, and you will find bookſellers who will deal with you."

"The proſpect thus offered me," continued Marchmont, "was not very flattering; but I had very little choice, and I ſet about what is ſometimes called an epic in proſe, and acknowledged to be, when well managed, a conſiderable effort of the human mind; and ſometimes ſtigmatiſed as a ſpecies of work calculated only to enervate the mind, and inflame with falſe repreſentations the imagination of youth. I went on (as I believed myſelf) pretty well at firſt; but when my hero was fairly launched into the hiſtory, I found myſelf ſurrounded with difficulties, and in danger, as every page proceeded, of going againſt

ſome of thoſe rocks which my inſtructor had taught me to beware of. Without incident nothing was to be done, but almoſt every poſſible event was already in print; and notwithſtanding what my adviſers had ſaid, I was too proud to borrow. Improbable and forced adventures, events that never yet happened on the habitable globe, and never could happen by any chance ſhort of an abſolute miracle, diſguſted *me*; and proſing converſations, or circumſtances but little elevated above the daily occurrences of life, would, I thought, diſguſt my readers. As to characters, I had not yet ſeen enough of the world to *imagine* them, from the faint ſketches I had made; and I found that, if I repreſented ſuch as had come within my obſervation, I ſhould be accuſed of perſonality. If I made my hero an unfortunate wanderer, exiſting by his own efforts, I underſtood that I ſhould be accuſed of egotiſm, and of having repreſented my own adventures. If I made

made him too long or too ſuddenly proſperous, nobody would care about him at all. If he were painted with too many perfections, he would be called a poor imitation of Sir Charles Grandiſon—a faultleſs monſter: but if I gave him a proportion of thoſe errors to which high-ſpirited youth is particularly liable, I ſhould then be accuſed of having pictured an agreeable libertine, whoſe example, like thoſe of Ranger, Charles Surface, or Tom Jones, could not fail of being pernicious.

" Nor was the landſcape of my piece leſs difficult to decide upon than the figures. If my ſcene lay in other countries, I muſt give to my characters the manners of thoſe countries, which of courſe rendered them leſs intereſting to the bulk of my intended readers in this: I might indeed have carried my ſtory to the reigns of our Edwards and Henries—but beſides that this ſpecies of writing was already ſucceſsfully occupied, I

could not repreſent modern manners as exiſting in the perſons of our anceſtors in their heavy armour, and fierce proweſs; or in their ſofter moments, in ſatin doublets and ſlaſhed ſleeves. I found too the preſervation of the unities a work of ſome difficulty. I was told, and indeed I ſaw from ſeveral examples, that neither time nor place was much minded, and that I might hazard being equally careleſs of chronology and geography; but I piqued myſelf on having ſtudied Ariſtotle, and ſcrupulouſly attended to the probabilities of time and place. I turned my eyes to the ſcenes that were paſſing almoſt before them, and thought, by relating without much addition from fiction ſome of the many events that were paſſing in private life in a neighbouring country, that I might unite intereſt with truth: I was ſoon, however, turned aſide from this experiment, by hearing that novel-writing has in one reſpect an affinity to the drama—

that

that time and diſtance are required to ſoften for uſe the harſher features that may be exhibited from real life; that it was almoſt impoſſible to bring forward *events* without touching on their *cauſes*; and that any tendency to political diſcuſſion, however liberal or applicable, was not to be tolerated in a ſort of work which people took up with no other deſign than to be amuſed at the leaſt poſſible expence of thought. In this caſe I was to be like the courtly preacher, who deemed it altogether ſhocking to

"——mention *Hell* to ears polite."

"Thus, in a choice of difficulties, I laboured on—with what ſucceſs, it now matters not. At ſome other opportunity (if indeed I dare indulge the hope that, at ſome future time, I may be allowed the happineſs I now enjoy) I may trouble you, Madam, with the hiſtory of my progreſs with *the encouragers of literature*, among whom indeed I found

found it to be true, that the fraternity of Bookſellers are, for the moſt part, to be relied on, and with *them* at leaſt I ſo ſucceſsfully made my way, that I was enabled to aſſiſt my family (though by no means to the extent of my wiſhes), and to ſupply myſelf. I believe indeed I ſhould have done better in time (as on my *ſoi-diſant* friends of *every deſcription* I ceaſed to depend), but to carry on this buſineſs in obſcurity was impoſſible. No ſooner was my name known as being in ſome degree a ſucceſsful candidate for literary emolument, than my addreſs was procured by Vampyre from my publiſher, and I became more than ever the object of that monſter's perſecution. He himſelf ventured, ſheltered as he believed by the armour of his profeſſion, to preſent his own hideous libel on the human form in my lodgings—attended, as he almoſt always is, by a miſerable ſneaking being of a clerk.—I liſtened for two or three minutes to his

his inſolence—and then, though I think I am not of a very choleric temper, found myſelf ſeized with an impulſe to kick him down ſtairs, ſo irreſiſtible, that I immediately ſhewed him that manner of deſcending with great velocity, and then handed his clerk after him into the ſtreet—where the mob, who in a ſecond of time gather in a populous thoroughfare, hearing, from the people where I lodged, that the reptile they ſaw ſo ſuddenly ſpring out of the door into the middle of the coach-way was a villanous attorney who had ruined a family, determined to add an epilogue to my figure-dance, by no means to the taſte of Mr. Solicitor Vampyre; whoſe zeal for his clients might well have been cooled by the diſcipline he received under the next pump, had it not been re-animated by reſentment for this perſonal diſgrace. He now had added a freſh cauſe of vengeance to his native diabolical malignity, and to his deſire

to

to find new excuſes for getting money from his ſtupid and wicked employers.—From that time he redoubled his perſecution, and I was compelled either to ſubmit to imprifonment, or to fly.—Though this ſcourge to individuals, and diſgrace to the ſpecies in general, often practiſes and reſides in *the neighbourhood of a great ſea-port* not far from the place where we now are, it was here—that—on account of Mrs. Moſely . . . (Marchmont heſitated, and ſeemed to be confuſed) and for other conſiderations, I determined to conceal myſelf. Of the ſequel I believe it is unneceſſary to ſpeak."

Althea, though her countenance bore evidence how much this narrative had affected her, did not immediately find words that anfwered to her meaning.—Marchmont availed himſelf of her ſilence again to plead for permiſſion to write to her: and his eloquence was perhaps aided by the circumſtance of the moment;

ment; for a ſignal was ſuddenly given from behind ſome high rocks to the left of that where they ſat, and the boat, with Fenchurch and two ſeamen in it, immediately appeared from beyond a promontory. Marchmont, unwilling to expoſe Althea to the gaze of theſe men, now tore himſelf away, having at length obtained the permiſſion he ſo ardently ſolicited—and, hurrying from her, made a ſignal to Fenchurch to bring the boat on ſhore farther on, where high cliffs ran out into the ſea, and ſhut out all near view of the ſpot where he was now compelled to take a reluctant leave of Althea.

When he was gone, ſhe ſat down breathleſs, and with a beating heart, on her former ſeat; hardly daring to recollect what had paſſed, or to enter on any ſelf-enquiry as to the propriety of her conduct. With eyes fixed on the ſea, ſhe waited in an undeſcribable ſtate of mind for the ſight of the boat, and

fancied

fancied that, amidſt the low and almoſt imperceptible murmurs of the tide, ſhe heard the daſhing oars. Nor was ſhe deceived; in a few moments ſhe ſaw it ſlowly appear beyond the promontory. Marchmont was ſtanding in it, his looks apparently fixed on the place where he had left her—but the diſtance was ſoon too great to allow her to diſtinguiſh his features. She ſaw, however, that he ſtretched his arms towards her, then claſped his hands together as if offering a prayer to heaven for her ſafety. The dull haze that had been long gathering over the ſea, now thickened ſo much, that the boat, and the paſſengers in it, became indiſtinct; appearing only like a dark ſhapeleſs ſpot amidſt the wide expanſe of water; and it was ſoon afterwards hardly to be ſeen at all. While Althea could trace, or fancy ſhe could trace it through the miſt and intervening diſtance, ſhe remained on the ſhore, then reluctantly and ſlowly returned by the

the rugged ſteps to the ſummit of the cliff; and from thence again ſurveyed the ſea, now undiſtinguiſhable from the ſky, all being alike overclouded. She thought, however, that ſhe ſtill ſaw the boat move through the diſtant waves—till the head-land which forms one ſide of Torbay* ſeemed to intervene. It was there, as Marchmont had informed her, the veſſel lay that was to receive him.—The heart of Althea, recently awakened to new ſenſations by the certainty that Marchmont loved her, now ſunk in ſick and languid deſpondence; for ſhe reflected that it was more than poſſible ſhe had loſt ſight of him for ever.

Hardly diſtinguiſhing her way, ſhe now looked around her to be certain that ſhe was in the right road back to the houſe of Eaſtwoodleigh, which, large as it was, could not be diſtinguiſhed

* Berry Head.

even

even from this high ground, becauſe of the numerous tall elms every where lining the lanes of this country, which in many places appeared like a continual wood. Fortunately ſhe had remarked a ſingular bank of red-coloured earth in her way, which now ſerved her as a guide to the ſteep lane ſhe had aſcended; and afterwards her road lay entirely along it, till ſhe came to the ivy-clad ruins of one of the lodges of the diſparked environs of Eaſtwoodleigh.

When Althea entered the houſe, ſhe haſtened immediately to her own room, fancying, as ſhe paſſed Wansford and his wife, that they both looked at her as if they knew ſhe returned from meeting Marchmont—ſo much power has the imagination when the conſcience is not calm. In fact, it was in the preſent caſe merely conſcience that raiſed this idea; for, though Wansford knew it, he carefully avoided looking at her as ſhe

came

came in—and his wife had no certain knowledge that Marchmont had ever been in the houſe, and was free from every ſuſpicion that related to Althea.

To a young and ingenuous mind there is nothing ſo painful as the firſt idea of having committed an error.—Althea, who had always accuſtomed herſelf to enquire whether what ſhe did was perfectly conſonant to the maxims ſhe had received from Mrs. Trevyllian, thus eſtabliſhing a ſort of ſecond conſcience as her guide, now trembled to make this appeal. Yet, when once it was made, many reflections aroſe which helped to reconcile her to herſelf. Though ſhe had died unmarried, Mrs. Trevyllian had none of that prudiſh reſerve which often degenerates into ridiculous auſterity at a late period of life. She had not indeed taught Althea, that the firſt purpoſe of her life was to attract a man of fortune for a huſband, but had rather

endeavoured

endeavoured to give her ſuch principles as would make her paſs a ſingle life in cheerful content, if ſuch (as was very probable) ſhould be her lot, notwithſtanding her perſonal advantages, and the ſweetneſs of her manners; for Mrs. Trevyllian knew, that to conſiderations merely intereſted ſhe never would ſacrifice herſelf; while it was very doubtful whether ſuch a man as united the advantages of fortune to thoſe of a cultivated mind, would ever fall in her way. From this manner of thinking during the courſe of her education, Althea had acquired an ingenuous ſimplicity of character. She had no deſign on the hearts of the men ſhe converſed with, and was therefore always eaſy and unaffected, without familiarity or flippancy. But ſhe had never been taught to believe, that it was right to fly from or avoid any man becauſe he was indigent; and ſhe knew that Mrs. Trevyllian herſelf had

had been much attached to a gentleman of very ſmall fortune, whoſe death alone prevented their marriage. Though unacquainted with the particular circumſtances which had thrown a ſhade of melancholy over the life of her aunt (for ſhe had never courage to ſpeak of them), Althea was aſſured, from this inſtance, that, had her aunt been living, ſhe would not have condemned her partiality to Marchmont, though ſhe might have thought marriage very imprudent under the preſent circumſtances of both their fortunes. Nor could Althea help reflecting, that the obſervation Marchmont made was but too juſt, when he ſaid that ſhe was accountable to nobody; for her father ſeemed entirely to abandon her, and ſhe had no other relations who had either inclination or right to direct her. Her ſituation, therefore, was altogether different from that of a young woman directly under the protection of a parent,

rent, or of immediate friends. She broke through no duty; and the tender compaſſion and perſonal preference with which ſhe thought of Marchmont, and which had induced her to conſent to correſpond with him, interfered with none of thoſe principles of conduct which her propriety of mind would never have allowed her to violate.

Having thus reconciled herſelf to the paſt, ſhe ventured to look forward to the future; but her courage and hope failed when ſhe thought of the ſituation in which her unhappy lover had left his native country to go he hardly knew whither, but probably to another where danger and diſtreſs were likely to meet him. He had evaded all explanation on money matters: but there was every reaſon to ſuppoſe he was but ſlenderly ſupplied with the means of exiſtence; and it appeared very uncertain, whether on his reaching France it would

would be poſſible to make his way acroſs the whole kingdom to the ſouthern coaſt, where, not far from Toulon, his relation the Baron de Lavergnac reſided. If he did reach that ſide of France, from all preſent intelligence there was too much cauſe to apprehend that Monſieur de Lavergnac was involved in the general ruin that menaced the royal party, to which he decidedly belonged.

With all theſe apprehenſions continually preſent to her, Althea now taſted no more peace than when ſhe knew Marchmont to be within a hundred paces of her, and to be in momentary danger of being dragged away to end his life in a priſon.

Yet diſtant and uncertain dangers appeared leſs hideous than the perſecution of the *fiend* Vampyre; and when ſhe remembered that another day might have put Marchmont into his hands, the aſſurance of his eſcape ſeemed a gratify-

ing reflection, and the gloomy uncertainty of what was to come appeared leſs terrible.

A long interval was yet to paſs before any intelligence of the poor wanderer could arrive; and Althea was conſcious how tedious and forlorn her deſolate ſolitude would appear. Though ſhe had never been accuſtomed to confidantes of her own age (for Mrs. Trevyllian had always diſliked that girliſh caballing which frequently corrupts the minds of young people), ſhe now felt the want of ſome one to whom ſhe could ſpeak of Marchmont without reſtraint. Her thoughts again turned towards his mother and his ſiſters. To them alone could ſhe hazard naming him. But they were far from her; and as Marchmont had aſſured her that his mother intended, as ſoon as he was in a place of greater ſafety, to acknowledge all the kindneſſes that Althea had intended, or that Marchmont

mont had received; ſhe was compelled to wait for this overture from Mrs. Marchmont, before ſhe could venture to expreſs the ardent deſire ſhe felt to love and ſerve her.

CHAP. X.

"Ah! do not think thou art alone unhappy!"

THE day after the departure of Marchmont, the calm ſtillneſs of the morning tempted Althea to reviſit the ſhore, which was in ſome meaſure a new object to her, and would now, ſhe thought, afford her a melancholy pleaſure. From thence ſhe propoſed walking to the cottage of Mrs. Moſely, with whom ſhe wiſhed to converſe; and having procured ſuch a direction from Wansford as was likely to be a ſufficient guide, ſhe ſet forth about one o'clock, intending to take a cold dinner at her return.

The

The ſame ſpot, where for perhaps the laſt time Althea had ſeen the only man ſhe had ever thought of with approbation, and who might be called indeed almoſt the only perſon in the world who felt an intereſt in her fate, or for whom ſhe was herſelf intereſted, could hardly fail of inſpiring her with mournful reflections: but with them a degree of pleaſure mingled itſelf, and the ſort of day was well calculated to encourage the melancholy yet ſoothing reverie ſhe fell into.

As on the day preceding, a gauzy miſt hovered over the unruffled ſea, ſpreading from thence to the land, and ſoftening every object of the rich coaſt on either ſide.

The quiet ſolemnity of the hour and ſcene was not broken by the gay and lively verdure of May, for the diſtant landſcape was ſoftened by the hazy vapour; yet, as ſhe wandered ſlowly

along the broad margin of ſand, which ſhe had been told led to an eaſier acclivity of the cliff, from whence her walk to the cottage might be conſiderably ſhortened, ſhe remarked ſome of thoſe plants, inhabitants of the borders of the ſea, of which her aunt had taught her the names on a former viſit to the coaſt.

The * ſea reed graſs, covering many of the broad beds of ſand, waved its yet feeble ſpires in the hardly perceptible breeze; within the immediate ſpray of the waves the ſea † holly put forth its gray and thorny leaves; and where the more undiſturbed ſurface of the ſands allowed them to be clothed with a ſlight covering of turf, the ſmall yellow ſtars of the ‡ ladies' bed-ſtraw were juſt opening among it.—The fairy noſe-

* Arundo Arenaria. † Eryngium Maritimum.

‡ Galium Verum.

gays,

gays, which with this and the beautiful convolvulus *, peculiar to the weſtern coaſt, a native alſo of the arid beach, ſhe uſed to delight in making, while walking with her dear protectreſs, came to her remembrance, and, ſoftened as her mind was before, filled her eyes with tears.

But the recollection of Mrs. Trevyllian was always ſalutary. In recalling thoſe ſimple pleaſures, the admirable leſſons with which every enjoyment was accompanied recurred to her. Among theſe, fortitude was a virtue on which her aunt had conſtantly dwelt with peculiar energy; as if ſhe had foreſeen how much occaſion her beloved Althea would one day have to exert it. Inſtead, therefore, of allowing herſelf to dwell on ideas which ſerved only to depreſs and enervate her mind, ſhe turned

* Convolvulus Soldanella.

it towards the means of fulfilling the parting wiſhes of Marchmont, who had entreated her to allow his mother and his ſiſters to be known to her, and to transfer to them all that active benevolence of friendſhip of which he could not avail himſelf. The poor old ſervant at the cottage, too, he had warmly recommended to her humanity; and arouſed by theſe recollections ſhe ſhook off that pleaſing but uſeleſs penſiveneſs which was ſtealing upon her, and quickened her pace towards the cabin of Mrs. Moſely, which ſhe found with leſs difficulty than ſhe expected; for, though concealed by the rude inequalities of a common, which was at the weſtern extremity of the grounds of Eaſtwoodleigh, it was hardly mile from the ſea. She found the ſolitary tenant of this lone cottage full of trouble. Whatever terrors ſhe had undergone for "*her dear child, her dear young maſter,*" as ſhe called Marchmont, while for the courſe of

ſeveral

ſeveral months he had been hunted by the blood-hounds of the law, they were now forgotten in the cruel idea, that he was "*gone beyond ſea*;" which amounted, in the opinion of Mrs. Moſely, to a certainty that ſhe ſhould ſee him no more.

Wild and vague ideas of ſcenes paſſing in France, horrible enough, and rendered more ſtrangely hideous by her long-rooted prejudices, had taken poſſeſſion of Mrs. Moſely's mind—but ſtill the predominant impreſſion was, the danger of "*going beyond ſea.*"

Althea for a moment attempted to ſtifle all ſhe felt herſelf, to combat impreſſions ſo painful to a mind already enfeebled by time and calamity; and though to all that ſhe could ſay the poor old woman gave no other anſwer than a deep ſigh, and a motion with her head that expreſſed hopeleſs incredulity as to the ſafety of her "*dear maſter*," Althea began to flatter herſelf that ſhe ſhould

ſhould reaſon her into more tranquillity, when a quick ſtep was heard near the cottage door.

Althea ſtarted without knowing why; and Mrs. Moſely, accuſtomed to be always on the watch ſince Marchmont's perſonal ſafety had been in queſtion, moved to the door as quickly as her infirmities permitted, and, looking out, returned to her ſeat, ſaying it was only poor Phœbe.

"And who is poor Phœbe?" enquired Althea.

"Poor unhappy girl!" replied Mrs. Moſely, "ſhe is a godchild, Madam, of mine; and never any body met with greater misfortunes for her ſtation. Her poor brain is hurt by all ſhe has gone through; but ſhe is very harmleſs, and ſometimes her ſenſes return again for a time. I am afraid, poor creature! ſhe is in one of her wandering fits now—for ſhe ſeldom comes at other times. Indeed,

deed, I have not ſeen her before theſe two months."

Althea had no time to enquire farther as to the object that had already excited her pity, when a young woman of one or two and twenty, pale and thin, her dreſs clean but coarſe, and without a hat, entered the room with a hurried ſtep; and not ſeeming to obſerve that Althea was there, ſhe came up to the old woman, and, taking her hand, ſmiled —but it was a melancholy ſmile—then looking ſteadily in her face, ſaid,

"I have got to you at laſt, my dear friend! They would have hindered me again: but I have ſtole away from them; and you will let me ſtay with you, will you not?"

"Yes, Phœbe," ſaid Dame Moſely, "if you will ſtay in the houſe, and not leave me without telling where you are going to. But there is the young lady that uſed to ſend me ſo much help when you was here laſt."

"The

"The young lady!" cried the unhappy girl, "I am in the way then—I am ſorry I came. Pray forgive me; I did not know the lady was here. Pray be not angry—I will go home again—indeed I will."

"No, no," interrupted Althea, "you ſhall ſtay here, Phœbe. I am myſelf going preſently; and till I do, it will diſtreſs me if you do not ſit down and talk to your old friend juſt as you uſed to do."

Phœbe looked at her with an unſteady yet expreſſive eye; then, turning to Mrs. Moſely, ſhe ſaid in a half whiſper,

"She is like the angels I uſed to dream of once, when I had hopes of going among them away from this bad world; and I thought they had juſt ſuch voices."

"That lady *is* as much of an angel as ever was in this world," replied Mrs. Moſely aloud.

Phœbe

Phœbe anſwered only by a deep ſigh. Dame Moſely again ſpoke to her. She heeded her not, but, fixing her eyes on the window, ſighed again as if her heart would break. Then, after a moment's pauſe, ſhe turned quickly, and ſaid,

"You remember! So now, as you are buſy, dear godmother, I will go."

"Not down to the ſea-ſide," anſwered the other.

"Why! I have not been there a long, long time, till to-day, indeed! and I am better, a great deal better for it."

"Well, well, Phœbe, you muſt not go again—you muſt not, indeed. Come, if you do not mind me I ſhall be angry, and will not let you come to ſee me again."

"Won't you?—Oh! that will be very cruel. And will you, my oldeſt and laſt friend, be as cruel as all other people are? Well, if you will, *do* then! make me be ſhut up again, and make me to be beat

beat and puniſhed by that cruel . . . . ." (another deep ſigh burſt from her ſad heart, but ſhe went on), " by that cruel . . . . . Ah! well, it will be the ſooner over! If nobody, nobody at all, is left, who has compaſſion for me—perhaps it may not be ſo difficult to die, as I find it now!—But I tire you. Pray, Ma'am, excuſe me," (turning to Althea, with a half courteſy) " I am a poor miſerable creature, without a friend left in the wide world."

Althea was ſo affected that ſhe could not anſwer her, otherwiſe than by turning to Mrs. Moſely, and begging her to ſooth the poor girl rather than contradict her.

" Come, Phœbe," ſaid the old woman, " if you have been to the ſea-ſide, you cannot deſire, you know, to go again. You ſhall go and lie down upon my bed; for I am ſure your head aches, and that you are tired. Come, be a good

good girl, and then you ſhall ſtay with me a day or two."

It ſeemed as if the unſettled mind of this unfortunate being was tremblingly alive to the voice of kindneſs; for without farther oppoſition ſhe gave her hand to Mrs. Moſely, and ſuffered her to lead her out.

When ſhe got to the door ſhe turned towards Althea, and, with her head mournfully declined, ſighed out, "God bleſs you, young lady!"

Mrs. Moſely returned in a few minutes.—"I've made her lie down," ſaid ſhe; "and perhaps ſhe may forget herſelf while I make her a little tea, which is the only thing ſhe will take."

"Let me aſſiſt you, my good woman," ſaid Althea; "and do tell me who this poor young creature is, and by what misfortunes ſhe has been driven to this pitiable ſtate."

"Ah! dear Miſs, it is a long ſtory, and

and you know old folks are apt to be tedious—it will tire you, I fear."

"No, no—on the contrary, I ſhall not be eaſy without hearing it. Make her tea, and carry it to her. I will have ſome too, for I am fatigued this morning, and while ſhe remains quiet you ſhall relate to me all you know of her. Juſt now there is nothing I would ſo willingly liſten to."

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END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.